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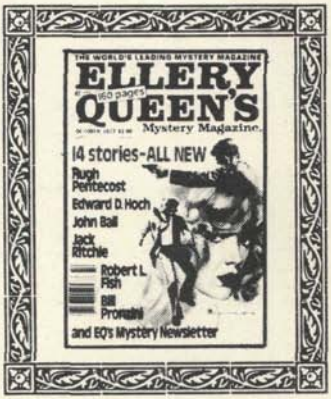

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 72, No. 3, Whole No. 418, SEPT., 1978. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.25 a copy. Annual subscription $15.00 in U.S.A. and possessions; $17.00 elsewhere. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017, (212) 949-9190. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Ct. 06835. Second-class postage paid at N.Y., N.Y., and additional mailing offices.

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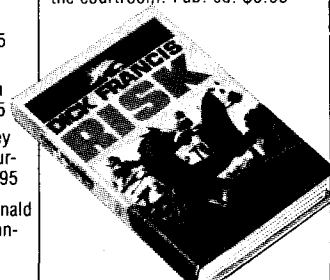

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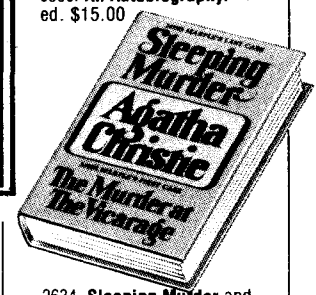

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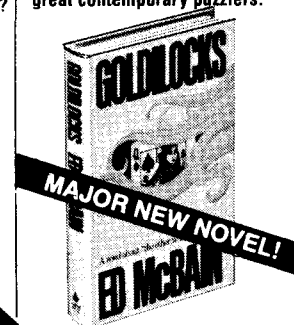

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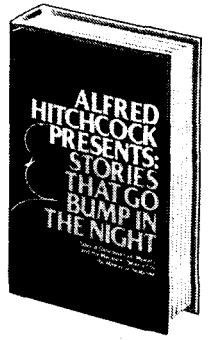

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Every once in a while a story's opening sentence is so provocative, so attention-getting, so startling that you will drop everything and plunge into reading the story. One classic example is Francis Iles's first sentence in BEFORE THE FACT *(1932): "Some women give birth to murderers, some go to bed with them, and some marry them." Now read the opening two sentences in Ruth Rendell's newest short story—and plunge.*

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BORN VICTIM

by RUTH RENDELL

I murdered Brenda Goring for what I suppose is the most unusual of motives. She came between me and my wife. By that I don't mean to say there was anything abnormal in their relationship. They were merely close friends, though "merely" is hardly the word to use in connection with a relationship which alienates and excludes a once-loved husband. I murdered her to get my wife to myself once more, but instead I have parted us perhaps forever, and I await with dread, with impotent panic, with the most awful helplessness I have ever known, the coming trial.

By setting down the facts—and the irony, the awful irony that runs through them like a sharp glittering thread—I may come to see things more clearly. I may find some way to convince those

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inexorable powers that be of how it really was; to make Defending Counsel believe me and not raise his eyebrows and shake his head; to insure, at any rate, that if Laura and I must be separated, she will know as she sees me in the court that the truth is known.

Alone here with nothing else to do, with nothing to wait for but that trial, I could write reams about the character, the appearance, the neuroses, of Brenda Goring. I could write the great hate novel of all time. In this context, though, much of it would be irrelevant, so I shall be as brief as I can.

Some character in Shakespeare says of a woman, "Would I had never seen her!" And the reply is: "Then you would have left unseen a very wonderful piece of work." Well, would indeed I had never seen Brenda. As for her being a wonderful piece of work, I suppose I would agree with that too. She once had had a husband. To be rid of her forever, no doubt he paid her enormous alimony and had settled on her a lump sum with which she bought the cottage up the lane from our house.

She made the impact on our village that one would expect of such a newcomer. Wonderful she was, an amazing refreshment to all those retired couples and cautious weekenders, with her bright-colored clothes, her long blonde hair, her sports car, her talents, and her jet-set past. For a while, that is. Until she got too much for them to take.

From the first she fastened onto Laura. Understandable in a way, since my wife was the only woman in the locality who was of comparable age, who lived there all the time and had no job. But surely—or so I thought at first—she would never have singled out Laura if she had had a wider choice. To me my wife is lovely, all I could ever want, the only woman I have ever really cared for, but I know that to others she appears shy, colorless, a simple and quiet little housewife. What, then, had she to offer to that extrovert, that bejeweled butterfly? Laura gave me the beginning of the answer herself.

"Haven't you noticed the way people are starting to shun her, darling? The Goldsmiths didn't ask her to their party last week and Mary Williamson refuses to have her on the fête committee."

"I can't say I'm surprised," I said. "The way she talks and the things she talks about."

"You mean her love affairs and all that sort of thing? But, darling, she's lived in the sort of society where that's quite normal.

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It's natural for her to talk like that, it's just that she's open and honest."

"She's not living in that sort of society now," I said, "and she'll have to adapt if she wants to be accepted. Did you notice Isabel Goldsmith's face when Brenda told that story about going off for a weekend with some chap she'd picked up in a bar? I tried to stop her going on about all the men her husband named in his divorce action, but I couldn't. And then she's always saying, 'When I was living with so-and-so,' and 'That was the time of my affair with what's-his-name.' Elderly people find that a bit upsetting, you know."

"Well, we're not elderly," said Laura, "and I hope we can be a bit more broad-minded. You do like her, don't you?"

I was always very gentle with my wife. The daughter of clever domineering parents who had belittled her, she grew up with an ineradicable sense of her own inferiority. She is a born victim, an inviter of bullying, and therefore I have tried never to bully her, never even to cross her. So all I said was that Brenda was all right and that I was glad, since I was out all day, that she had found a friend and companion of her own age.

And if Brenda had befriended and companioned her only during the day, I daresay I shouldn't have objected. I should have got used to the knowledge that Laura was listening, day in and day out, to stories of a world she had never known, to hearing illicit sex and duplicity glorified, and I should have been safe in the conviction that my wife was incorruptible.

But I had to put up with Brenda myself in the evenings when I got home from my long commuting. There she would be, lounging on our sofa, in her silk trousers or long skirt and high boots, chain-smoking. Or she would arrive with a bottle of wine just as we had sat down to dinner and involve us in one of those favorite debates of hers on the lines of: "Is marriage a dying institution?" or "Are parents necessary?" And to illustrate some specious point of hers she would come out with some personal experience of the kind that had so upset our elderly friends.

Of course I was not obliged to stay with them. Ours is quite a big house, and I could go off into the dining room or the room Laura called my study. But all I wanted was what I had once had—to be alone in the evenings with my wife. And it was even worse when we were summoned to coffee or drinks with Brenda, there in her lavishly furnished, over-ornate cottage to be shown

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the latest thing she had made—she was always embroidering and weaving and potting and messing about with water colors—and shown too the gifts she had received at some time or another from Mark and Larry and Paul and all the dozens of other men there had been in her life.

When I refused to go, Laura would become nervous and depressed, then pathetically elated if, after a couple of blissful Brenda-less evenings, I suggested for the sake of pleasing her that I supposed we might as well drop in on good old Brenda.

What sustained me was the certainty that sooner or later any woman so apparently popular with the opposite sex would find herself a boy friend and have less or no time for my wife. I couldn't understand why this hadn't happened already and I said so to Laura.

"She does see her men friends when she goes up to London," said my wife.

"She never has any of them down here," I said, and that evening when Brenda was treating us to a highly colored account of some painter she knew called Laszlo who was terribly attractive and who adored her, I said I'd like to meet him and why didn't she invite him down for the weekend?

Brenda flashed her long green-painted fingernails about and gave Laura a conspiratorial woman-to-woman look. "And what would all the old fuddy-duddies have to say about *that*, I wonder?"

"Surely you can rise above that sort of thing, Brenda," I said.

"Of course I can. Give them something to talk about. I'm quite well aware it's only sour grapes. I'd have Laszlo here like a shot, only he wouldn't come. He hates the country, he'd be bored stiff."

Apparently Richard and Jonathan and Stephen also hated the country or would be bored or couldn't spare the time. It was much better for Brenda to go up and see them in town, and I noticed that after my probing about Laszlo, Brenda seemed to go to London more often and that the tales of her escapades after these visits became more and more sensational. I think I am quite a perceptive man and soon there began to form in my mind an idea so fantastic that for a while I refused to admit it even to myself. But I put it to the test.

Instead of just listening to Brenda and throwing in the occasional rejoinder, I started asking her questions. I took her up on names and dates. "I thought you said you met Mark in America?" I would say, or "But surely you didn't have that holiday with

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Richard until after your divorce?" I tied her up in knots without her realizing it, and the idea began to seem not so fantastic after all. The final test came at Christmas.

I had noticed that Brenda was a very different woman when she was alone with me than when Laura was with us. If, for example, Laura was out in the kitchen making coffee or, as sometimes happened on weekends, Brenda dropped in when Laura was out, she was rather cool and shy with me. Gone then were the flamboyant gestures and the provocative remarks, and Brenda would chat about village matters as mundanely as Isabel Goldsmith. Not quite the behavior one would expect from a self-styled Messalina alone with a young and reasonably personable man.

It struck me then that in the days when Brenda had been invited to village parties, and now when she still met neighbors at our parties, she had never once attempted a flirtation. Were all the men too old for her to bother with? Was a slim, still handsome man of going-on-fifty too ancient to be considered fair game for a woman who would never see 30 again? Of course they were all married, but so were her Paul and her Stephen, and, if she were to be believed, she had had no compunction about taking them away from their wives.

If she were to be believed. That was the crux of it. Not one of them wanted to spend Christmas with her. No London lover invited her to a party or offered to take her away. She would be with us, of course, for Christmas lunch, for the whole of the day, and at our Boxing Day gathering of friends and relatives. I had hung a bunch of mistletoe in our hall, and on Christmas morning I let her into the house, Laura being busy in the kitchen.

"Merry Christmas," I said. "Give us a kiss, Brenda," and I took her in my arms under the mistletoe and kissed her on the mouth. She stiffened. I swear a shudder ran through her. She was as awkward, as apprehensive, as repelled as a sheltered twelve-year-old. And then I knew. Married she may have been—and it was not hard now to guess the cause of her divorce—but she had never had a lover or enjoyed an embrace or even been alone with a man longer than she could help. She was frigid. A good-looking, vivacious, healthy girl, she nevertheless had that particular disability. She was as cold as an ice cube. But because she couldn't bear the humiliation of admitting it, she had created for herself a fantasy life, a fantasy past, in which she reigned as a fantasy nymphomaniac.

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At first I thought it a huge joke and I couldn't wait to tell Laura. But I wasn't alone with Laura till two in the morning and then she was asleep when I came to bed. I didn't sleep much. My elation dwindled as I realized I hadn't any real proof and that if I told Laura what I'd been up to, probing and questioning and testing, she would only be bitterly hurt and resentful.

How could I tell her I'd kissed her best friend and got a freezing response? That, in her absence, I'd tried flirting with her best friend and been repulsed? And then, as I thought about it, I understood what I really had discovered—that Brenda hated men, that no man would ever come and take her away or marry her and live here with her and absorb all her time. Forever she would stay here alone, living a stone's throw from us, in and out of our house daily, she and Laura growing old together.

I could have moved, of course. I could have taken Laura away. From her friends? From the house and the countryside she loved? And what guarantee would I have that Brenda wouldn't have also moved, to be near us still? For I knew now what Brenda saw in my wife—a gullible innocent, a trusting everlasting credulous audience whose own inexperience kept her from seeing the holes and discrepancies in those farragos of nonsense and whose pathetic determination to be worldly prevented her from showing distaste.

As the dawn came and I looked with love and sorrow at Laura sleeping beside me, I knew what I must do, the only thing I could do. At the season of peace and good will I decided to kill Brenda Goring for my own and Laura's good and peace.

Easier decided than done. I was buoyed up and strengthened by knowing that in everyone's eyes I would have no motive. Our neighbors thought us wonderfully charitable and tolerant to put up with Brenda at all. I resolved to be positively nice to her instead of just negatively easy-going, and as the New Year came in I took to dropping in on Brenda on my way back from the post office or one of the village shops, and if I got home from work to find Laura alone I asked where Brenda was and suggested we should phone her at once and ask her to dinner or for a drink. This pleased Laura enormously.

"I always felt you didn't really like Brenda, darling," she said, "and it made me feel rather guilty. It's marvelous that you're beginning to see how nice she really is."

What I was actually beginning to see was how I could kill her

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and get away with it, for something happened which seemed to deliver her into my hands. On the outskirts of the village, in an isolated cottage, lived an elderly unmarried woman named Peggy Daley, and during the last week of January the cottage was broken into and Peggy was stabbed to death with her own kitchen knife. The work of some psychopath, the police seemed to believe, for nothing had been stolen or damaged.

When it appeared likely that they weren't going to find the killer, I began thinking of how I could kill Brenda in the same way so that the killing would look like the work of the same perpetrator. Just as I was working this out Laura came down with a flu bug she had caught from Mary Williamson.

Brenda, of course, came in to nurse Laura, cooked my dinner for me and cleaned the house. Because everyone believed that Peggy Daley's murderer was still stalking the village, I walked Brenda home at night, even though her cottage was only a few yards up the lane that skirted the end of our garden. It was pitch-dark there as we had all strenuously opposed the installation of street lighting, and it brought me an ironical amusment to notice how Brenda flinched and recoiled when on these occasions I insisted she take my arm.

I always made a point of going into the house with her and putting all the lights on. When Laura began to get better and all she needed in the evenings was to sleep, I sometimes went earlier to Brenda's, had a nightcap with her, and once, on leaving, I gave her a comradely kiss on the doorstep to show any observing neighbor what friends we were and how much I appreciated all Brenda's kindness to my sick wife.

Then I got the flu myself. At first this seemed to upset my plans, for I couldn't afford to delay too long. Already people were beginning to be less apprehensive about our marauding murderer and were getting back to their old habits of leaving their back doors unlocked. But then I saw how I could turn my illness to my advantage.

On Monday, when I had been confined to bed for three days and that ministering angel Brenda was fussing about me nearly as much as my own wife was, Laura remarked that she wouldn't go across to the Goldsmiths' that evening as she had promised because it seemed wrong to leave me. Instead, if I was better by then, she would go on Wednesday, her purpose being to help Isabel cut out a dress.

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Brenda, of course, might have offered to stay with me instead, and I think Laura was a little surprised that she didn't. But I knew the reason and had a little quiet laugh to myself about it. It was one thing for Brenda to flaunt about, regaling us with stories of all the men she had nursed in the past, quite another to find herself alone with a not very sick man in that man's bedroom.

So I had to be sick enough to provide myself with an alibi but not sick enough to keep Laura at home. On Wednesday morning I was feeling a good deal better. Dr. Lawson looked in on his way back from his rounds in the afternoon and announced, after a thorough examination, that I still had phlegm in my chest. While he was in the bathroom washing his hands, I held the thermometer he had stuck in my mouth against the radiator at the back of the bed. This worked better than I had hoped—worked, in fact, almost too well. The mercury went up to 103, and I played up to it by saying in a feeble voice that I felt dizzy and kept alternating between the sweats and the shivers.

"Keep him in bed," Dr. Lawson said, "and give him plenty of warm drinks. I doubt if he could get up if he tried."

I said rather shamefacedly that I had tried and I couldn't and that my legs felt like jelly. Immediately Laura said she wouldn't go out that night, and I blessed Lawson when he told her not to be silly. All I needed was rest and to be allowed to sleep. After a good deal of fussing and self-reproach and promises not to be gone more than two hours at the most, Laura finally went off at seven.

As soon as the car had departed, I got up. Brenda's house could be seen from my bedroom window, and I saw that she had lights on but no porch light. The night was dark, moonless and starless. I put trousers and a sweater on over my pajamas and made my way downstairs.

By the time I was half way down I knew that I needn't have pretended to be ill or bothered with that thermometer ploy. I *was* ill. I was shivering and swaying, great waves of dizziness kept coming over me, and I had to hang on to the banisters for support.

That wasn't the only thing that had gone wrong. I had intended, when the deed was done and I was back home again, to cut up my coat and gloves with Laura's electric scissors and burn the pieces in our living-room fire. But I couldn't find the scissors and I realized Laura must have taken them with her to her dressmaking session.

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Worse than that, there was no fire alight. Our central heating was very efficient and we only had an open fire for the pleasure and cosiness of it, but Laura hadn't troubled to light one while I was upstairs ill. At that moment I nearly gave up. But it was then or never. I would never again have such circumstances and such an alibi. Either kill her now, I thought, or live in an odious *ménage à trois* for the rest of my life.

We kept the raincoats and gloves we used for gardening in a closet in the kitchen by the back door. Laura had left only the hall light on, and I didn't think it would be wise to switch on any more. In the semidarkness I fumbled about in the closet for my raincoat, found it, and put it on. It seemed tight on me, my body was so stiff and sweaty, but I managed to button it up, and then I put on the gloves. I took with me one of our own kitchen knives and let myself out by the back door. It wasn't a frosty night, but it was raw and cold and damp.

I went down the garden, up the lane, and into the garden of Brenda's cottage. I had to feel my way round the side of the house, for there was no light there at all. But the kitchen light was on and the back door unlocked. I tapped and let myself in without waiting to be asked.

Brenda, in full evening rig, glittery sweater, gilt necklace, and long skirt, was cooking her solitary supper. And then, for the first time ever, when it didn't matter any more, when it was too late, I felt pity for her.

There she was, a handsome, rich, gifted woman with the reputation of a seductress, but in reality as destitute of people who really cared for her as poor old Peggy Daley had been; there she was, dressed for a party, heating up tinned spaghetti in a cottage kitchen at the back of beyond.

She turned round, looking apprehensive, but only, I think, because she was always afraid when we were alone that I would try to make love to her.

"What are you doing out of bed?" she said, and then, "Why are you wearing those clothes?"

I didn't answer her. I stabbed her in the chest again and again. She made no sound but a little choking moan and she crumpled up on to the floor. Although I had known how it would be, had hoped for it, the shock was so great and I had already been feeling so swimmy and strange that all I wanted was to throw myself down too and close my eyes and sleep. But that was impossible.

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I turned off the cooker. I checked that there was no blood on my trousers and my shoes, though of course there was plenty on the raincoat, and then I staggered out, switching off the light behind me.

I don't know how I found my way back, it was so dark and by then I was light-headed and my heart was drumming. I just had the presence of mind to strip off the raincoat and the gloves and push them into our garden incinerator. In the morning I would have to get up enough strength to burn them before Brenda's body was found. The knife I washed and put back in the drawer.

Laura came back about five minutes after I had got myself to bed. She had been gone less than half an hour. I turned over and managed to raise myself to ask her why she was back so soon. It seemed to me that she had a strange distraught look about her.

"What's the matter?" I mumbled. "Were you worried about me?"

"No," she said, "no," but she didn't come up close to me or put her hand on my forehead. "It was—Isabel Goldsmith told me something—I was upset—I. . .It's no use talking about it now, you're too ill." She said in a sharper tone than I had ever heard her use, "Can I get you anything?"

"I just want to sleep," I said.

"I shall sleep in the spare room. Good night."

That was reasonable enough, but we had never slept apart before during the whole of our marriage, and she could hardly have been afraid of catching the flu, having only just got over it herself. But I was in no state to worry about that, and I fell into the troubled nightmare-ridden sleep of fever. I remember one of those dreams. It was of Laura finding Brenda's body herself, a not unlikely eventuality.

As it turned out, she didn't find it. Brenda's cleaner did. I knew what must have happened because I saw the police car arrive from my window. An hour or so later Laura came in to tell me the news which she had got from Jack Williamson.

"It must have been the same man who killed Peggy," she said.

I felt better already. Things were going well. "My poor darling," I said, "you must feel terrible, you were such close friends."

She said nothing. She straightened my bedclothes and left the room. I knew I should have to get up and burn the contents of the incinerator, but I couldn't get up. I put my feet out and reached for the floor, but it was as if the floor came up to meet me and

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threw me back again. I wasn't too worried. The police would think what Laura thought, what everyone must think.

That afternoon they came, a Chief Inspector and a Sergeant. Laura brought them up to our bedroom and they talked to us together. The Chief Inspector said he understood we were close friends of the dead woman, wanted to know when we had last seen her, and what we had been doing on the previous evening. Then he asked if we had any idea at all as to who had killed her.

"That maniac who murdered the other woman, of course," said Laura.

"I can see you don't read the papers," the Chief Inspector said.

Usually we did. It was my habit to read a morning paper on the way to the office and to bring an evening paper home with me. But I had been at home ill. It seemed that a man had been arrested on the previous morning for the murder of Peggy Daley.

The shock made me flinch and I'm sure I turned pale. But the policemen didn't seem to notice. They thanked us for our cooperation, apologized for disturbing a sick man, and left. When they had gone I asked Laura what Isabel had said to upset her the night before. She came up to me and put her arms round me.

"It doesn't matter now," she said. "Poor Brenda's dead and it was a horrible way to die, but—well, I must be very wicked—but I'm not sorry. Don't look at me like that, darling. I love you and I know you love me, and we must forget her and be as we used to be. You know what I mean."

I didn't, but I was glad whatever it was had blown over. I had enough on my plate without a coldness between me and my wife. Even though Laura was beside me that night, I hardly slept for worrying about the stuff in that incinerator.

In the morning I put up the best show I could of being much better. I dressed and announced, in spite of Laura's protests, that I was going into the garden. The police were there already, searching all our gardens, actually digging up Brenda's.

They left me alone that day and the next, but they came in once and interviewed Laura on her own. I asked her what they had said, but she passed it off quite lightly. I supposed she didn't think I was well enough to be told they had been inquiring about my movements and my attitude toward Brenda.

"Just a lot of routine questions, darling," she said, but I was sure she was afraid for me, and a barrier of her fear for me and mine for myself came up between us. It seems incredible but that

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Sunday we hardly spoke to each other and when we did, Brenda's name wasn't mentioned. In the evening we sat in silence, my arm round Laura, her head on my shoulder, waiting, waiting. . .

The morning brought the police with a search warrant. They asked Laura to go into the living room and me to wait in the study. I knew then that it was only a matter of time. They would find the knife, and of course they would find Brenda's blood on it. I had been feeling so ill when I cleaned it that now I could no longer remember whether I had scrubbed it or simply rinsed it under the tap.

After a long while the Chief Inspector came in alone.

"You told us you were a close friend of Miss Goring's."

"I was friendly with her," I said, trying to keep my voice steady. "She was my wife's friend."

He took no notice of this. "You didn't tell us you were on intimate terms with her, that you were, in point of fact, having a sexual relationship with her."

Nothing he could have said would have astounded me more. "That's absolute rubbish!"

"Is it? We have it on sound authority."

"What authority?" I said. "Or is that the sort of thing you're not allowed to say?"

"I see no harm in telling you," he said easily. "Miss Goring herself informed two women friends of hers in London of the fact. She told one of your neighbors she met at a party in your house. You were seen to spend evenings alone with Miss Goring while your wife was ill, and a witness saw you kiss her good night."

Now I knew what it was that Isabel Goldsmith had told Laura which had so distressed her. The irony of it, the irony. . .Why hadn't I, knowing Brenda's reputation and knowing Brenda's fantasies, suspected what construction would be put on my assumed friendship for her? Here was motive, the lack of which I had relied on as my best defense. Men do kill their mistresses, from jealousy, from frustration, from fear of discovery.

But surely I could turn Brenda's fantasies to my own use?

"She had dozens of men friends, lovers, whatever you like to call them. Any of them could have killed her."

"On the contrary," said the Chief Inspector, "apart from her ex-husband who is in Australia, we have been able to discover no man in her life but yourself."

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I cried out desperately, "I didn't kill her! I swear I didn't!"

He looked surprised. "Oh, we know that." For the first time he called me sir. "We know that, sir. No one is accusing you of anything. We have Dr. Lawson's word for it that you were physically incapable of leaving your bed that night, and the raincoat and gloves we found in your incinerator are not your property."

Fumbling in the dark, swaying, the sleeves of the raincoat short, the shoulders too tight. . ."Why are you wearing those clothes?" she had asked before I stabbed her.

"I want you to try and keep calm, sir," he said very gently. But I have never been calm since. I have confessed again and again, I have written statements, I have raged, raved, gone over with them every detail of what I did that night. I have wept. Then I said nothing. I could only stare at him. "I came in here to you, sir," he said, "simply to ask if you would care to accompany your wife to the police station where she will be charged with the murder of Miss Brenda Goring."

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a *NEW* short story by

THOMAS WALSH

"Even as a boy he had not been called Slim or Lefty or Red, as if they had known better than that way back in grade school. Killer had been his nickname—Killer Bill" . . . Stay with this story. Take our word for it—everything will become clear . . .

KILLER BILL

by THOMAS WALSH

The afternoon that Sergeant Jack Donnelly came around looking for him, from the state trooper's barracks over in Raybrook, Bill Jonah decided that he had better get out of town as fast and far as he could. It was a few days after the Chateaugay bank holdup in which a woman teller had been shot in the head, and so Jonah had to confront two obviously indisputable facts—one, that in all likelihood the woman was now dead, and two, that over in Raybrook ballistics had swung a finger around toward the man who had done the thing.

"He said to wait for him," the landlady added to Jonah. "He's making a call out to Gabriels, but he'll be right back. He said Major Robinson wants to see you."

Jonah paused over her on the dark stairwell, left hand stricken motionless on the wooden handrail for a moment or two. Twenty-seven years old, Bill Jonah had rugged features and somber gray eyes that he permitted to show nothing of what he felt to her, and went on up to his apartment with no more than a stolid nod down.

"Yes, I will," he said. "I'll wait out on my front porch, Mrs. Cavanaugh. Thanks a lot."

But of course he did not wait. He stood in the upper hall, his mouth a bit dry, the muscles in the back of his neck rigid, until

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he heard Mrs. Cavanaugh go back to the kitchen. Then he came downstairs again quickly and very lightly, not to be heard. His big new car, the one he had bought for his and Eileen's honeymoon, was just outside, and 45 minutes later he turned right onto the Northway.

All that night he drove and drove—something to keep his mind busy, and to prevent, if at all possible, further thought of a cheerful pretty little woman named Loretta McLaughlin, who had left two small children—and early the next morning he checked in at a motel near Baltimore, Maryland. There he stayed alone in his room for a couple of days, but it was all of no use; the same as before, unfortunately.

But on the second afternoon he had to start back. Something to do, Jonah had decided by then; a little matter that had to be fully explained, and for the last time—to Eileen—anyway, once and for all. He had smashed his life now, beyond any possible repair. The only decent thing left for him to do was not to smash hers too.

And he drove back just the way he had driven down, in one straight spurt, his gray eyes sunken and noticeably haggard now, a two-days' growth of beard on his face. Usually he was quiet and reserved by nature, at least with everyone but Eileen; but despite his appearance of rugged toughness and muscular physical power he had never thought of himself as a violent individual. Yet there again he felt that other people had always known better.

There was something about him apparently, something unmistakable—a quick and instinctive knowledge, even in perfect strangers, that he was a man to be treated with care and respect, and one not to be challenged recklessly. His revolver he always kept in the glove compartment. The bottle of whiskey which he'd bought near Wilmington on the ride back, to help keep him going, lay still corked on the front seat beside him. It was ready there, if it became necessary, but not just yet. Something might happen.

And later that night, after he had driven for another ten hours running, something did happen. It happened on the last stretch of his trip, on the Adirondack Northway again, and in a rest area 70-odd miles north of Albany. He used the rest room facilities, washed his hands once again—how many times in the last few days? A psychological indication, perhaps?—and back at the car checked his wrist watch.

It was a few minutes past two in the morning, and back up on the Northway the only traffic to be seen was a big trailer truck

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rumbling past for New York. After that had gone by there was not even the distant murmur of another vehicle, nothing at all but a low humming quiet, much like the thoughts in his mind, and with the same impression of lonely and hopeless desolation.

A string of overhead lights, glaring down on the pavement like frozen and motionless small suns, presented the theatrical brilliance of a carefully arranged stage set waiting for actors, and after getting back into the car he put both arms on the steering wheel and wearily rested his head on them. Funny thing how people had always known about him. Even as a boy he had not been called Slim or Lefty or Red, as if they had known better than that way back in grade school. Killer had been his nickname—Killer Bill. So . . .

He had not expected to doze off, no such luck any more for Bill Jonah; but all at once it was 3:05 by the dashboard clock, and he became fuzzily aware that crisp and authoritative knuckles had rapped at the front window beside him. When he glanced up blearily, the first thing he saw was a wide-brimmed state trooper's hat and a not-too-clear glimpse of a stolidly official face under it. He had hoped for a quiet hour with Eileen without encountering any of them, and not Jack Donnelly in particular, but now it seemed he should have known it would not be permitted to happen in such fashion. All he could do was rub his eyes first, rub his mouth after that, and roll down the window.

"Hi," Jonah said. "How's it going, Jack? They got you working late duty tonight?"

"Name doesn't happen to be Jack," the voice said. "Name's Trooper Callahan, not that it makes any difference, mister. Call into Albany on his registration, Art, and see what they got on him. He could be our man."

Other steps moved around from the back of the car and a second trooper's hat shadowed a second face. But that one could be seen a lot better with the walkway lights shining straight down on it, and Jonah felt a sudden and altogether foolish grin on his lips. The next instant he had a more sensible reaction. The muscles in his forearms tensed coldly and instantly.

Up near the rest-room building he could see their car—the same kind of anonymous black sedan, not officially marked, that the state police occasionally used on speed patrol. There was no other car in the rest area, and no other people. And again, from back up on the Northway, there was not even a whisper of sound.

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The first one, his legs athletically apart and his hands on hips, scrutinized Jonah's face carefully, then glanced in at the whiskey bottle on the front seat. The second one, Art, continued on by to squat down at the front fender. Off in the woods an October wind whispered, and in the valley under them low-lying white mist drifted about like thick steam. Then Art straightened himself and nodded to his partner.

"Could be," he agreed. "Guess he is. How's he look to you, Lenny? Like he's been hitting the sauce tonight?"

"Got a bottle right on the front seat," Lenny nodded. "Medicinal purposes, maybe. Okay, mister. Let's see your license and registration, please. You coming from Lake George?"

"Hah?" Jonah said. He said it deliberately, pretending drunken slowness of mind, because it came to him that if he could get them to believe the drunkenness bit he might still have some sort of chance. His revolver was in the glove compartment, but he had to get it. How? He was not frightened—Jonah was not an easy man to frighten, but he could feel a couple of cold drops of sweat under his chin.

There was no one else around, and all four lanes of the Northway were abandoned and palely forlorn under a wan three o'clock moon. No help there for him, and none for them, either. What should he do? He let out a long drunken belch and lurched out of the car with a show of alcoholic belligerence.

"Well, sure," he said. "Where do you think I'm coming from? I'm on the northbound side, ain't I?"

"That you are," Art said, responding grimly in kind. "Check his license and registration, Lenny, and see if he can manage that line in the pavement for us. Fellow I picked up right around here last week I could have arrested for drunken walking."

"Drunken walking?" Jonah said, now pushing himself out pugnaciously. "You mean me? Say, listen here. What the hell do you think—"

"No, you listen," Art said, reaching in and taking Jonah's keys from the ignition switch. His gun was in plain sight at his belt. So was Lenny's. Therefore easy on now, Jonah cautioned himself. There were still only the two cars in the rest area. There were still only the three men. "Watch your step, mister," Art went on. "Do just what you're told. The license and registration now. I think he's the one hit that Volkswagen back in Lake George, Lenny. We're bringing him in."

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But Jonah realized at once that he must not show them his license and registration. They were in his wallet and would identify him immediately. So he belched again and pretended he had to steady himself by putting a hand on the car door.

"Now wait a minute," he said, wheedling this time. "I never even stopped in Lake George. What Volkswagen? What are you talking about?"

"Your license," Lenny repeated patiently. "Your registration, mister. You've got them, haven't you? If you don't, I'm afraid there's going to be a little matter of four charges against you. No license, no registration, no proof of ownership—and maybe driving while intoxicated. So I'd get them out right now. Come on, will you?"

"Then give me a chance," Jonah muttered. Two of them, one of him—and how to get at that glove compartment? If he asked permission to open the glove compartment they might deny it and search it themselves. But if he did not ask permission, if he only walked around the car as the most natural thing in the world... "Right here," he added, and moved past Art to the door on the passenger's side. "Give me a chance, can't you? Just a second now."

"Hope you got them," Art said coldly. "Check him out, Lenny. I might as well use the john while we're here."

And he strutted off, all shiny and authoritative trooper's neatness, toward the rest room. Jonah peered low under the brows after him, still muttering.

"One thing I can't take," he complained to Lenny. "You guys gimme the damn ticket, if you feel like you have to—but don't try to push me around like a ten-year-old kid. You seem like a decent enough guy, Lenny. But him—"

"Oh, he's all right," Lenny said. "He'll listen to reason, mister. I guess the two of you just rubbed each other the wrong way. But the license, remember?"

And now, thankfully, the odds had been reduced to one against one, and Jonah flopped himself in on the car seat. He felt everything cold but alert in him, just properly tense, and still peering out at Lenny he began groping in the glove compartment under a couple of road maps.

"Right in here," he went on. "I ain't trying to give you a hard time, Lenny. All I had tonight was two beers down to Albany. Swear to God."

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But in the end he must not have been as persuasive as he had hoped, or else, because that was the way a careful and experienced police officer would behave until a driver had been fully identified, Lenny was cautious enough, at the last moment, to keep watching Jonah's hands through the open window on the passenger's side. And there was, unfortunately, a certain detail that Jonah had not considered. It was that when he opened the glove compartment, the small inside light automatically snapped on.

But it was too late now to turn back. Lenny had seen, and what happened next happened faster than thought. Lenny shouted for Art, in warning or anger, in fear or appeal, and at once, when he saw Jonah's right hand sweeping around with the gun, Lenny fired two shots.

It was impossible for him to miss at that distance, and he didn't. Jonah spun around instantly on the seat as if he had run into a battering ram and could only fire back so fast and desperately that he could not remember how often he did. At the next moment he was out of the car, instinct taking over, and down on one knee by the back fender ready for Art. Lenny, dead Lenny, was no problem any more. Killer Bill Jonah had hit him at least twice, and exactly between the eyes.

Now Art sprang back out of the rest room, gun in hand. But as he did, Jonah managed to get the car between them and fired two more shots. One of them smashed into the wall over the rest-room door, close enough to scare but not to hit, and the second shattered one corner of the frosted glass window beside it. That was all the reaction time Art needed. He sprawled at full length, rolled over and rolled back frantically. He was still firing, but blindly and to no effect, when the rest-room door swung shut behind him.

Perfect stillness after that, nothing at all to be seen alive and moving in the whole rest area from back of the car; no sound of any kind, not from Art, not from dead Lenny, not even the wind any more—and not so much as a flicker of shadow. Still frozen and undisturbed, the overhead lights glared down on the narrow white path that led off to the benches and tables of the picnic grounds, and the slanted railing shadows were printed motionless on the walk as though they were marked off in black ink.

Only then did Jonah begin to feel the pain. It was almost unbearable. It felt as if his left arm and the left side of his chest had

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been smashed in. His lips contracted and he steadied himself with both hands, this time for real, against the back of the car trunk. Hit, he realized, and hit seriously—but no time for that now. What was Art doing in the rest room? What would he try next?

Jonah could not say. Halfway between them he saw a pay telephone booth, but at once he understood it was of as much use to either of them as if it had been located on the southernmost tip of Tierra Del Fuego. The first man who moved for it would offer a clear shot to the other. No help there, consequently, and once again, up on the Northway, not a car to be seen at this time of the year and at this hour of the night, not even the faint distant humming of one. What to do?

Again Jonah could find no answer. He could hear himself beginning to breathe raggedly and felt his legs tremble. Blood stained his black and white flannel shirt, very much blood, and more of it dripped under his sleeve and trickled down on the car from his spread fingers. True enough, he had the car now between him and Art—but Art had the rest-room wall between him and Jonah. And Jonah could not get away in his new Chevrolet because Art had taken possesison of his keys a few minutes ago and still had them down there in the rest room. It was the old Mexican standoff. Jonah had Art pinned down—but Art had Jonah.

While Jonah was attempting to think it out, there was a light tinkle of glass from the rest room, and the overhead bulb went out. Of course, Jonah realized foggily. Art was careful enough this time, anyway. He had smashed the bulb so that Jonah could not see his shadow against the window. He knew what he faced now—man against man, life against life. He was quick enough. All Jonah could do was crouch back of the car and all Art could do was peer out carefully, invisible himself, through the smashed window.

Impasse, then—and impasse in all ways. An unwounded Bill Jonah, zigging and zagging desperately up to the Northway, might have risked a run for it now and commandeered the first car that came along; but the present Bill Jonah, still losing so much blood that he felt himself turning weak in head and legs, could not possibly make so much as ten feet with Art watching and waiting behind that window. While on the other hand, to get at his car, Art would have at least 30 or 35 feet to cover—and with no protection anywhere. He would not risk it. He could not. Impasse.

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There was only the rest room for Art, if he had a brain in his head, and only back of the car for Bill Jonah. They were both trapped. Because there was only one window and one door in the rest room, Jonah remembered from his earlier trip in there. All around, in every other place, there was solid tiled wall. Rest area, he thought numbly. Who in the world had thought up that name?

Raising his head slowly and cautiously, Jonah discovered that through the rear window of his car, and through the right side window, he could keep the rest-room door under direct and unobstructed observation. But nothing moved there, and no one was foolish enough to show himself. No, Art was not that stupid or reckless. He must be peering now out of complete and protective darkness behind the window just as Jonah peered out from behind the car. They could only wait, each of them—but wait for what?

Again Jonah could not say—could not, as a matter of fact, even think clearly. The weakness was getting worse, drifting him in and out of himself, and when he heard a rushing whine of tires go by on the Northway he could not react promptly enough. Only seconds later, when it had vanished around the next turn, did he realize that he might have shot off his revolver, and got whoever it was to turn down here for him. Yet a shot might not have been heard in a car racing along as fast as that one, or gunfire might have been taken as from hunters illegally shining deer out of season. But say that it had stopped and turned in. Who would most likely be helped by it? Art or Bill Jonah?

But there was no question of that, either. An innocent motorist would first see a dead man lying out in plain sight, with an unmistakable state trooper's hat a foot or two away from him, and then he would see a man in a bloody windbreaker with a gun in his hand. What would he do? One thing, certainly. He would immediately pick up speed and get the hell out of there even if the man with the gun attempted to stop him. He would not stop. He might even, in crazy panic, run down the man with the gun. He might report the thing from the first Northway callbox, or the next village, but that was all. And the motorist who had just raced by had not even slowed up. What were the chances another would?

But now, still bracing himself groggily against the car trunk, Jonah discovered that it had become very difficult to think in any sensible fashion. He was losing too much blood. He was getting weaker than ever. Was there any way to stop the bleeding? Because if he did not. . .

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He laid his revolver down on the car trunk but within instant reach, and after an infinity of labor managed to get a handkerchief out of his pants pocket, never removing his eyes from the rest-room door. But it was even more effort to get his shirt and undershirt open, to pick up the handkerchief after letting it drop out of his hand stupidly, and then to wad it in as well as he could against his left side, under his arm. He staggered a few steps when that had been done, and after it had to brace himself with both hands on the car trunk. The next thing he knew he was not even in the rest area any more.

He was caught up, instead, by a darkness and jungle stink that he had never forgotten, and never would. Two dead companions in the brush behind him, blown to bits; three more shot down by the first explosion of enemy machine-gun fire; and one last one, the worst of all, whispering and whispering in the slit trench Jonah had contrived for him. "Mama," was the one word he had kept saying, time after time. "Oh, Mama. Please, Mama. Mama, Mama, Mama." And he had kept it up almost until help came, but not quite; just the one word beside Jonah, over and over.

Then Jonah drifted away even from that; drifted to Eileen. He had to get out of this, something else began nagging at him. It was necessary. Or wait a minute. No, it wasn't. There was not even Eileen any more for Killer Bill Jonah. She turned away from him with a gesture of unbearable loathing and repulsion, her face averted—and he knew why. She did not want to hear what he was attempting to explain to her.

"No, I don't want to listen to you," she cried at him. "I didn't know what kind of man you were and what you've done to people. I won't listen any more. I can't. Leave me alone!" So Jonah tried to grab at her dress, to hold her—and discovered that he had rolled clear of the car trunk and was lying on his left elbow, his bloody and smashed elbow, almost beside dead Lenny.

That was at once seen from inside the rest room and at once acted on. Two venomously whining *spannngggs* ricocheted from the tire iron near his head, while tiny particles of concrete dust spattered his cheeks and mouth and jerked him back to a more normal realization. Scrambling back of the car somehow, he again rested on it, and with his right hand jerking crazily from side to side, then up and down, Jonah tried to return fire. But now something else had happened. He could not fire. He was out of bullets.

At that Jonah turned up his eyes to all the pale cold stars in

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the blackness of the October sky and heard himself chuckle aloud. Just a few inches away from him, in the car trunk, there was a brand-new box of cartridges, but there was no possible means for Jonah to get in at them. Art still had his car keys and Art was still down there in the rest room. No, no. Jonah was all done now, so why not accept the thing? Eileen must be permitted to turn her head from him—as she would, being Eileen, if she ever found out. Now Bill Jonah was called on to do what was required of him, if he was a man. Get it over with! What was he waiting for? Finish the thing!

"Hey, Art!" he heard himself shout boisterously. "You want to know something? You missed again. Better come out now and with both hands over your head. Your only chance. You hear what I say? Hear what I'm telling you, Art? Hands over your head!"

There was no answer. Jonah felt himself slide down helplessly, and then he had to kneel in that position with his chest heaving, his eyes squeezed shut. Yes, finished and done. Because at this moment, even if he did not yet realize it, Art had all the cards in the deck. He could walk out of the rest room now and put as many shots as he wanted to put into Bill Jonah, and he would. He knew what had happened to Lenny. He would make very sure it didn't happen to him. And therefore. . .

Effortfully, as if from a very great distance, Jonah became aware that something had changed in the rest area. There were no longer two cars in it any more. There were three. The third one, a compact yellow sedan, had parked just in front of the rest room, past his car and Art's. Jonah tried to collect himself, knowing it was imperative now to take any chance at all.

He lurched out from his car shelter and there was another shot at him from the rest room. When he had to dodge back awkwardly, he found that his legs had almost buckled under him from that small effort. He could only lay forward, arms extended on the car, face turned to the yellow sedan.

A woman got out, leading a small girl in a dark coat and a white stocking cap. Then Art yelled from the rest room, and Jonah knew that he also had to yell.

"Come over here!" Jonah shouted breathlessly. "Come over here, lady. Run for it! You're in danger."

But Art had his chance too and he grabbed it.

"Don't listen to him," Jonah heard. "He wants a hostage! He

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just murdered a state trooper, lady. That's who's lying under his car. See the uniform? Come in here with me. I'll hold him off for you. Come on!"

Jonah again tried to shout but could not. He could only lie forward against the car, chest heaving, and watch the woman back off a couple of slow steps, eyes wide and fixed on dead Lenny, and with her arms protectively sweeping up the little girl against herself. A hostage? Jonah found himself thinking slowly and painfully. But of course! That was the only possible way out. Jonah had to get hold of her and the child. Because if he didn't . . .

Stumbling out recklessly from behind the car, gun in hand, shirt bloody, face bloody where he must have rubbed it a moment ago, Jonah saw the woman react in blind panic at the sight of him. He was too breathless to shout again, and there was no time. So he put his right arm out to her, the arm that held the gun, in a silent and helplessly imploring gesture—and she ran. She did not run for Jonah and the car, however. She ran for Art and the rest room. Then Jonah, attempting to run after her, fell down again, and the fall probably saved his life. Art's next bullet only whipped the fisherman's hat from his head.

After that Jonah was no longer rational. He could not run any more, but he could crawl—and toward the rest room. And he could not shout either, but he could whisper to himself. "All right. Coming in after you, then—got it all figured out about the hostage, have you? Okay, but I'm still coming in and you're not stopping me. I'm getting you, Art. I'll blow your head off. You've got one chance. Throw out your gun!"

But the gun was not thrown. Instead, it was fired at him. Jonah did not care. He was beyond that, and there were other matters to concentrate on. Push his gun; move the right knee; move the left knee; move each of his arms in turn; push the gun again. He could only push it in front of him baby fashion across the walk, toward the rest room, but he pushed it. He pushed it time after time, and, to control and hold back the pain, with a savage, teeth-baring grin on his lips.

He kept his head up, eyes glittering specterlike under sunken lids. All behind him now, on the white roadway, he was leaving a trail of dark veinous blood; and at last, no more shots, he was able to pause for an instant against the rest-room door. As he did, it gave way for him, although his left leg, still extended in back, held it open just about three inches.

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That was fortunate for Jonah. It permitted a narrow streak of outdoor light to follow him in, enough to see. The little girl, crouching back into the woman, stared down at him with bewildered and uncomprehending terror, while the woman had been pulled back in her turn under the state trooper's hat. So there was nothing left but pure bluff to try, and Jonah tried it. He grinned horribly and steadied the gun in both hands.

"You got till three," he croaked. "Just to three, Art—and I'm warning you. I've got to get out of here—and she's driving me. So throw down your gun. One. Two. Th—"

Something came through the air at him from behind the woman, but at first he could not see what it was. Then he could. It was Art's gun.

"Don't shoot," Art was half blubbering, half begging. "There's the gun—and what are we fighting for? You must be a fool. The only thing Lenny and I wanted—"

The woman backed off step by step into the tiled wall, keeping the child behind her. She turned her head a little, but her terrified dark eyes remained fixed on Jonah's bloody face, then on Jonah's bloody shirt, then on the gun. Jonah could hear her whispering at him as if from the other side of the Grand Canyon.

"No, please," she was saying. "I'll do anything you say. I'll drive the car if you want, anything—but leave her here. Don't hurt her. Don't hurt her, mister. She's only seven years old."

"No, no," Jonah whispered, and while keeping Art's gun pointed straight ahead at Art with both hands. "Just do what I tell you now, but wait a minute. I've been wounded, lady. I'm kind of bushed."

But she still kept shrinking from him, from the gun, from his bloody and horrible face. He had to make one final effort, but it took him a few seconds. Meanwhile, in the room dimness, they could only face each other.

"No, no," Jonah was able to repeat then. "It's all right here. It's all over. Don't pay any attention to that uniform he's got on. He isn't a real trooper, lady—and what he doesn't know, what he never had the brains even to suspect, is that I am."

"Well, what happened," Major Robinson said, speaking to a reporter from the Plattsburg daily paper next morning, "was that Trooper Jonah bought himself a new car last week, all set to get married, when he walked in on that bank holdup we had over in

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Chateaugay on Friday. Then of course all hell broke loose, and a teller named Loretta McLaughlin got shot in the head. But the bullet was located in such a spot that the doctors couldn't risk operating, though of course after she died we performed the autopsy.

"That gave Trooper Jonah three or four days of plain hell. Did he kill her? Or was it one of the two holdup men? He was kind of upset, anyway, getting married and all, and when poor Mrs. McLaughlin took three days to die, with nobody able to tell a thing yet, he must have gone into some kind of delayed shock. And of course we have to remember that name of his—Jonah."

"J-o-n-a-h?" the reporter said, making a note. "Like that hard-luck old character they got in the Bible?"

"Exactly," Major Robinson nodded. "And that could have been the start of all his trouble, the way I see it. Jonah the jonah, the other kids used to call him, and later on Killer Bill, always making fun of his name. But that was all right until he was doing his army service in Vietnam and found himself ambushed with six other soldiers. Everyone else was killed but Trooper Jonah, and after that his girl told me he kept brooding over the fact that he was the only one to get away safe. She tried to jolly him out of it, but she couldn't, and one night he burst out and told her that he wasn't going to spoil her life the way he'd spoiled the lives of those six fellows over in Vietnam. He'd convinced himself, the way people do, that he was personally responsible for that, and all he can think now is that he's Jonah the jonah in true fact.

"He can't eat any more; he can't even sleep, which his landlady told us; and so when we get the autopsy report, that it wasn't his bullet in Mrs. McLaughlin, I sent Sergeant Donnelly around to get him over here right away. I want to give him the good news myself. Only I can't, because he must have been convinced by than that it had to be bad news. So he sneaks out of the house, jumps in the new car he bought for his honeymoon, and takes off. He didn't tell anyone where he went, not even his girl. He simply vanished."

"Sounds like a pretty hard fellow," the reporter said. "But a pretty decent fellow, the kind that would blame himself for something that wasn't his fault at all. But what happened last night?"

"He was on his way back here," Major Robinson said. "Wanted to talk it over with his girl, I suppose, and make her understand that if Jonah had to live with the black spot over him she didn't.

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Only he stopped off in a rest area along the Northway, and the next thing he knows there are two fellows giving him orders just like they're legitimate state troopers. At first, in fact, he makes a mistake and thinks one of them is Jack Donnelly, but then it comes to him that he doesn't recognize either one, even though he knows every trooper up in this section of the woods. So who are they? What the hell is going on?

"It's three in the morning; there's small chance of anybody coming along to help him; and of course, if he gets out his wallet to show them his license and registration, they'll see his trooper's emblem which is right there on the flap. Then who knows what they might do? Get rid of him, probably, so he can't report back about what's going on. So he figured the best thing to do is to get his gun first, just in case, before identifying himself, only when he does get it he's a little too slow and is shot twice.

"It all was a real sweet little racket as long as it lasted, Walter. These fellows got somebody to make them two uniforms and two hats, then they bought themselves a plain black sedan just like we use occasionally, and after that, soon as they spotted somebody going over the limit or driving erratically, they moved right in. And who was going to come back and squawk about it afterward?

"See how cute they figured? Anybody who has a few drinks under his belt, or is out with a neighbor's wife, which happens around here once in a while, is scared half to death when two uniformed troopers flag him down and ask him questions about a hit-and-run accident back in Lake George or Glens Falls. They won't argue the matter. And when it's understood that maybe for fifty or a hundred bucks the troopers might be willing to forget the whole thing, they hand over the dough. Only last month we finally did pick up a few rumors about what's going on, and Trooper Jonah realized last night that he's the next patsy. He'd apparently been drinking; he's driving a new car, which means plenty of scratch; so everything is just fine, the way they see it."

"Not a bad little swindle," the reporter commented. "Or not until last night. But how's Trooper Jonah doing this morning? Was he shot bad?"

"Oh, not too bad," Major Robinson said, lighting a long thin cigar with evident relish. "But when that woman and her daughter came along, he couldn't wait for help any longer. He knew he had to move in before Mr. Phony grabbed them as hostages, and maybe got away. And Trooper Jonah's just fine, now that we have

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everything straightened out. I stopped in to see him at the hospital this morning, and his girl was there ahead of me. They were holding hands.

" 'Listen,' he says, still looking at her and not at me. 'You don't have to worry at all, Major. I'm going to do fine from here in. I'll have to, Eileen says. She's going to make me. And I got kind of a different slant on things now. You want to hear? The way everything's worked out for me, and for me and Eileen, the idea I have is that from now on Trooper Jonah has to be considered as just about the luckiest guy in the whole world.' "

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Robert Twohy's "Routine Investigation" appeared in the April 1964 issue of EQMM and was selected by Anthony Boucher for his BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR *(20th Annual Collection), published in 1965. The story, to quote Anthony Boucher, "may have created a new genre"—we had called it "a mystery of the absurd."*

Now, from one point of view it's a mad, mad, mad, mad, mad world, and from another it's a world of the absurd, and from still another it's a world of bizarre behavior. It's all in the eye of the beholder, so take your pick—or choose your own word to describe "what life is all about" . . .

INSTALLMENT PAST DUE

by ROBERT TWOHY

The phone rang. Moorman was lying on his back, on the couch. He was a large man, pushing 40, tousled and unshaved this morning in October. He wore a T-shirt, old slacks, no shoes. A glass of white wine was balanced on his stomach; a bottle of it stood on the floor. It was about eleven o'clock.

Moorman set the glass carefully on the floor, reached back over his head, and groped until his hand connected with the phone on the end table. He put it to his head and said in deep gentle tones, "I'm terribly sorry, but your application is rejected."

A moment of silence. Then, "What?"

"You heard me, Kleistershtroven."

"Klei . . . what is this?"

"You *are* Kleistershtroven, aren't you?"

"No."

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"I didn't say you were. Who'd want a name like that? Is it a Welsh name?"

"Listen, is this Mr. Moorman?"

"That doesn't matter. The fact is that no more entries for the quadrennial bobsled steeplechase are being accepted. That's on orders from my psychoanalyst. Would you care for his address?"

"This is Mr. Dooney." The voice was suddenly sepulchral.

Moorman said eagerly, "Dooney? Mr. Dooney? *The* Mr. Dooney? Calling *me*? At this hour?"

"Is this Mr. Moorman?"

"It certainly is. Are you really Mr. Dooney? Well, how in the world are you? How's the wife and all the brood? How's Miss LaTorche?"

"Miss LaTorche?"

Moorman emitted rich laughter. "Come on, Dooley, you old lecher, who do you think you're talking to? Everybody knows about you and Fifi LaTorche!"

"Who is this? Is this Jack Moorman?"

"Wait a minute, I'll find out."

Moorman put his hand lightly over the mouthpiece, and made loud braying noises. Then he said into the phone, "Yeah, Dr. Kleistershtroven says there's no question about it—I've been Moorman for years. Days, even."

"This is Mr. Dooney of Affiliated Finance. I talked to Mrs. Moorman on Friday—is she there?"

"Is she where?"

"Is she home?"

"Hold on." He took the mouthpiece from his mouth, turned his head, and called, "Lisa, some character named Dooley wonders if you're home . . . Where? I don't know where. I'll ask him."

He said into the phone, "She wants to know where you want to go, and if she should wear anything."

There was deep breathing. Moorman said admiringly, "You're a terrific deep breather!"

The voice was low and deadly: "I don't know what you're trying to pull here, Mr. Moorman. You've made a loan through us, and I talked to Mrs. Moorman on Friday and she said the payment would be in the mail. And this is Monday, and—"

"Don't tell me—let me guess. There's nothing in the mail, right?"

"I want to know why not."

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"I can explain that. I put the check in one of those new self-destructing envelopes and must have miscalculated the time it would take to reach you. It must have blown up in the mailbox."

"That's very funny," said Mr. Dooney, after a long silence. "Your wife promised Friday that the payment would be in the mail."

"Well, that's Lisa—always the cheerful word. You can't blame her for that. A recent Harris survey indicates that too much bad news is given over the telephone."

"You're very funny, Mr. Moorman. But this isn't funny—this is serious. You have an account with us for $784.47. Your September payment of $71.88 was due two weeks ago, and we haven't received it. We have a chattel mortgage on your furniture . . . I'm on the verge of going to the sheriff. But on the way I'm willing to stop by your place."

"Well, Lisa's not here. And things are kind of a mess."

"I'm leaving my office right now. When I get there I expect a check."

"When you get here I expect a disappointed man. But come anyway. I have some white wine and salami."

"I'm bringing Mr. Hector with me."

"That's okay. I have plenty of salami . . . Hector, eh? Do I know him?"

"No, you don't. I bring Mr. Hector when I want to convince someone that paying legitimate bills isn't a matter for joking. Do you understand?"

"Not really. But he sounds like an interesting guy . . . Does he like salami and white wine?"

"We'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Good. Be nice to see you both."

He hung up, and sipped wine, then lay back, placing the glass on his stomach. There was a pleasant smile on his face.

Inside 20 minutes the door chime sounded. Moorman set the glass on the floor, bounced from the couch, ran to the door, and threw it open, calling, "So good of you to come! How are you? It's Colonel Kleistershtroven, isn't it, formerly with the S.S.? How I remember those wonderful seminars of yours! . . . Ah, you brought a friend with you . . . don't I know him from somewhere?"

He had grasped the nearer man's hand, pumped it, and still held it as he peered in a benevolent manner at the other man.

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The man whose hand he held wore a neat tan suit, and had a pallid, tense young face with harried eyes. The other man was small, narrow-shouldered, balding, dressed in a dark suit; he had tight lips and cold eyes enlarged by thick-lensed glasses.

The first man, grimacing angrily, pulled his hand free. "I'm Mr. Dooney. This is Mr. Hector."

"Don't I know you, Mr. Hector?"

Mr. Hector's lips went tighter, and he shook his head.

"Sure I do! I've seen you plenty, out at the track."

Mr. Hector's enlarged eyes became more so. He shook his head harder.

"Sure, you're the guy." Moorman laughed in a friendly fashion. "You're pretty well-known out there. Everybody calls you 'The Stooper.' "

Mr. Hector said, in a strained voice, "What are you talking about?"

"He's being funny," said Mr. Dooney. "He thinks he's a comedian. He thinks this is all a joke."

"It isn't a joke," said Mr. Hector, and hefted his briefcase.

"Sure, the old Stooper—goes around picking up discarded mutuel tickets, looking for a winner somebody missed. You get many of those, Stoop? Is it a living?" He made to pat Mr. Hector in a comradely way on the shoulder; Mr. Hector twisted his narrow shoulder away from Moorman.

Dooney said, "The joke's just about over, Moorman."

"Oh. Well, why don't you come in?" His broad frame filled the doorway. "Why are you standing around in the hot sun? Come in, come in . . . How're the wife and all the brood? How's Miss LaTorche?"

He stepped back. Dooney proceeded in, his face stony. Mr. Hector followed.

"Sit down," said Moorman. "Sit down anywhere. Take that chair there, Stoop. Just throw the clothes on the floor. They're fresh ironed, but what's that to you? Like you say—*you* don't have to wear 'em. Just pitch 'em in the corner . . . right?"

Mr. Hector stared at him, then walked away across the room. There was a folding chair near the dining table. He sat down on it, with his briefcase on his knees, and looked at Moorman, his narrow face lowered and his lips drawn in.

Moorman dropped on the couch, crossing his legs. "Where are *you* going to sit, Dooley?"

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"Dooney."

"Right, Dooney. Where are *you* going to sit?"

"I'll sit in this chair here."

"There's an applecore on it."

"I can see the applecore. I'll remove it."

"Good thinking." Moorman nodded approvingly as Dooney picked up the applecore by the stem and dropped it in the near fireplace. "That's a good place for it. You must have been raised in the country. Nothing like a frosty night with the wind howling, and the sweet smell of roasting applecores . . . remember those nights, Dooley?" He blinked, and nodded, smiling reminiscingly.

Dooney sat down. He said, his voice flat, "This has been very amusing, Moorman. You're a very funny fellow. Now it's time to face some realities that are going to be a little bit harsher. Do you know what failure to meet the terms of a contract means?"

"Not really, no. Do *you* know, Stoop?"

"Stop calling him Stoop!"

"He doesn't mind, he's used to it. Everybody at the track calls him that." He smiled genially at Mr. Hector, whose thin lips became thinner. "Well, Dooley, what's on your mind? What can I do for you?"

"You can write me a check for $71.88. That's what you can do."

"Sure, I can do that easy enough. Is that all you want?" He slapped various pockets. "I don't seem to have my checkbook. Maybe Lisa's got it. Sorry. Well, I'll get it in the mail tonight—okay? As you know, my word is my bond." He smiled widely.

Dooney said, "You think you're such a comedian. Well, here are some facts." His forefinger picked out various articles in the room. "That color TV there, that dining table, those bookcases, the rug, the drapes—they're all going out of here. All of them. Today, this afternoon. And the beds in the bedroom, and the washing machine in the kitchen. When we leave here, we're going directly to the sheriff. We're going to get an order, Mr. Moorman—Mr. Hector is our company lawyer. He has the contract there in his briefcase—the contract you and Mrs. Moorman signed in our office. You're delinquent. You think it's all a big joke don't you? Tell him, Mr. Hector."

Mr. Hector nodded, fished in his briefcase, and pulled out a document. "This is the contract. It's all here, all signed and witnessed. There's no legal way to block appropriation. The furniture and appliances are all covered by the chattel mortgage—and as of

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now, it all belongs to Affiliated Finance."

"Oh." Moorman rubbed his jaw and looked solemn. "Well, all right. But I should tell you that the TV doesn't work too good. You got to keep kicking it to hold the picture. When you want to watch it, get some guy to stand by it and boot it every ten seconds. Otherwise, you have to keep throwing things at it."

Mr. Hector looked at him with huge glazed eyes. Moorman said, "Before you escalate your terror tactics . . . you claim to be a lawyer?"

"I am a lawyer."

"Anybody can say that. Do you have a badge?"

"A badge?"

"I didn't think so. Also, a real lawyer always carries a diploma."

"I have a diploma in my office."

"And I have a Thompson submachine gun in *my* office. That makes me the neighborhood hit man."

Dooney said, "This is one of his jokes, Morris—don't pay any attention."

"You say it's a joke?" Moorman sat forward, large hands clasped, face intent, brows drawn down. "Is that what I am to you? Is that what all of us are, all us little people who grub in the grime for our washing machines and color TVs, who sweat and strain to make our monthly payments so you and your flunky here can spend the day joy-riding around in your swanky Mercedes-Benz—"

"I have a Pontiac—'72 Pontiac."

"Whatever. Is that what we are to you—just a contemptible joke?"

He whipped his anguished face to Mr. Hector and jabbed a finger at him, his face gone suddenly hard and grim. "I want the simple truth, fellow—that's all I'm asking. You're The Stooper, and I know it and you know it. Your boss here doesn't know it, but—"

"He's not my boss."

"Well, whatever he is to you . . . that's none of my affair, I'm not going to open *that* can of worms. But the point is, you claim to know something about the law—"

"I'm a lawyer!"

"Yeah. You bragged about your famous diploma. Where'd you get it, some correspondence course advertised on a book of

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matches? Even from there you should have learned one thing—that if you can't prove the signatures on a contract are valid, that contract isn't worth the paper it's printed on."

Mr. Hector said, "Are you saying that these are not valid signatures?"

"Of course they're valid. Who says they're not? Are you implying that there's been a detent to infraud?"

"This is ridiculous," said Dooney. "Stop it, Moorman—we're busy men."

"Yeah. It's almost noon. You're probably hungry . . . Want some salami?"

"No."

"Bet Stoop does. He looks like he could use a good meal."

He went into the kitchen. They heard him whistling.

Mr. Hector muttered, "I've got a headache. This guy is crazy."

Dooney nodded glumly.

Moorman called, "How do you want your salami?"

"We don't. We're going, but we'll be back. With the sheriff *and* a truck."

Moorman came in. He bore in his right hand a four-foot salami. "Stick around, there's plenty. Stoop really looks hungry. Look at his eyes bug out at the sight of this!" He beamed at Mr. Hector. "Really go for salami, eh, Stoop? You want to wait for a knife, or you just want to start chewing?"

Mr. Hector was tucking the contract in his briefcase. Moorman tossed the salami gently so that it landed across Mr. Hector's knees. The lawyer stared at it in wonderment.

"You want one, Rooney? I got a couple more . . . If you don't want to eat it now, Stoop, shove it in your briefcase."

Dooney was on his feet. Mr. Hector stood up too, the salami rolling off his lap to the rug.

Dooney said, "Enjoy your joke. It'll be a lot of fun when Mrs. Moorman comes home and you tell her that all the furniture and the color TV and the beds and the washing machine are gone."

Moorman was quiet. His face looked suddenly strange and still.

He murmured, "I wish I could."

He had turned and was gazing out the wide sliding window at the back lawn. At the far end, near the redwood fence, was a patch of raw earth, recently spaded.

Dooney said, "What did you say?"

Moorman gazed out the window. The two men stared at him.

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Dooney said sharply, "Are you all right, Moorman?"

"What?" Moorman turned quickly. "Of course, of course! Why shouldn't I be?" He shook his head and laughed, a low forced note. "Thinking of something, that's all . . . just thinking of something."

Mr. Hector and Dooney looked at each other. Dooney said, "What's going on, Moorman?"

"Nothing." Moorman's smile looked set; he rapidly blinked his eyes. "Look, uh . . . all right, I did make some jokes. It was because I—well, all right, I wanted to take my mind off . . . listen, we all got problems, is that right? They're not all money problems. There's other things, too. I—I'm sorry if anything I said sounded insulting. It wasn't meant to be, it was just for fun—you seemed like good guys. There's nothing, nothing." He shook his head quickly and his stiff smile widened. "It was all just fooling around. Look, how much was that? Seventy-what?"

Dooney said, "$71.88."

"Okay. I got it right here, in my pocket. "$71.88, eh? I was going to give it to you . . ." He pulled out bills, and counted them off: "Twenty, forty, fifty, sixty, sixty-five, seventy, seventy-one . . . I got no change. Call it $72.00."

Dooney took the money. He said, "Do you have twelve cents, Morris?"

"I've got nine cents. That's all I have." The lawyer was going through his pockets.

Moorman said, "That's okay. That's fine." He pocketed the coins Mr. Hector held out. "That takes care of it, huh?"

"I'll write you a receipt for $71.91." Dooney had sat down again and taken a receipt book and pen from his pocket.

Mr. Hector was watching Moorman. He said quietly, "I suppose your wife will be pleased when you tell her the bill is paid."

"Yeah. She will." His quick responding smile was only a stretching of his lips. It did not touch his shadowed eyes.

"Is she away on a little trip?"

"What? Yeah. Right. She's visiting some relatives." He glanced out the window, across the lawn, then his glance shot back. "Yeah, she'll be pleased. Look, I'm sorry if I said some silly things, but that's the way the mind works sometimes." He walked them to the door. "Everything okay now?"

Dooney said, "All right, Mr. Moorman. Another payment is due in a couple of weeks."

"I know. It'll be there. You can count on it."

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They walked down the drive. He watched them.

Mr. Hector looked back, as he got in the car. He saw Moorman watching, his face set, his eyes still.

He said, as Dooney started the car, "Drive to the police station."

"What?"

"He's crazy. That was plain from the beginning . . . That patch of earth was almost raw."

Dooney stared ahead, as he drove through the tract.

"You saw what happened right after he first glanced out there. How he changed."

Dooney nodded.

"And right after that, so anxious to get things straightened out with us. To know that everything was all right—and that we weren't going to the sheriff."

Dooney said, "We got the payment."

"Yes, but . . . the way he changed, what he said, his craziness, his wife not being there . . . and the look of that spaded earth. This was no joke, Ron. Not that look in his eyes. There was a look of . . . I don't know—something horrible, something recent."

His thin lips tightened into the hint of a smile, and his large eyes glittered behind the thick glasses.

He said softly, "The next joke for Mr. Moorman may be a long time coming."

Moorman cut off a chunk of salami, which he ate as he finished the bottle of wine. Then he lay down on the couch.

The phone rang.

He picked it up, gave a deep vocal yawn, and sighed wearily, "Cannonball Express."

"Honey, how are you doing?"

"Good. Fine."

"How's the day off?"

"Terrific. How's your Aunt Letitia?"

"You mean Aunt Charlotte. She's fine. I'll stay a couple more days, I think."

"Okay."

"Good weather here . . . Love you, honey. Say, did you get hold of Affiliated Finance?"

"They got hold of me. Mr. Dooney called."

"You told him I just plain forgot to send the check, what with

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hurrying to catch the plane and all?"

"Well, not quite. But he got his money. He came out here with a lawyer. They were going to hijack the furniture."

"Good Lord! Is everything okay?"

"Oh, it's great. They think I've murdered you and buried you in the back yard."

"What! What did you tell them?"

"Nothing. I just looked out at the place I'd dug up Saturday to put in some tomato plants. And they got this weird notion."

"I wonder why."

"Well, you know . . . I have a few days off, and don't want to hang around the bars. I'm drinking a little white wine and missing you, and just hatching up a few things to pass the time . . . I expect the cops here shortly."

"Oh, Jack!" He could picture her shaking her head, and her eyes warm and loving and bewildered and at the same time not unhappy, and accepting the fact that he wasn't quite the standard suburban husband. "So you've been playing your games! When are you going to grow up?"

"Never, I hope. Sounds like no fun at all."

"You're almost forty!"

"That's a *canard.* I'm just sexually precocious. I'm really fourteen."

"Six, more likely."

"You could be right. Six is a good age for games."

"What are the cops going to do?"

"Belabor me with cacklebladders and boil me in midnight oil. Then they'll dig up the tomato plot again."

"You could be in trouble."

"Yeah, if you should get clumsy up there and fall into some bottomless pit. So don't disappear. Come home radiant and rambunctious, and we'll have a lot of fun."

"We always do . . . what'll come of it all?"

"What, game playing? Well, in the end you stop breathing, however you've lived—so why not have some fun while you still see the colors and hear the music?"

"Why not indeed?" she said softly. Then, briskly, "All right, Scarlet Pimpernel—what's the scenario, when I get back?"

"You go to the D.A. and do your damnedest to convince him that you're not dead and buried somewhere, and spring me. Then we sue Affiliated Finance for four hundred and eighty million dol-

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lars, for false arrest, slander, and general terpsichore . . . Oh, sweetheart, you know something? You won't believe it!"

"I know I won't. Tell me anyway."

"You know that little creep we've seen at the track a couple of times—long-nosed, ghoulish-eyed, sneaky-looking? Picks up the used tickets and looks them over?"

"The Stooper?"

"Yeah. Well, he's Affiliated Finance's lawyer."

"No!"

"You're right—not really. But I think I've got Mr. Dooney thinking he might be."

"That's terrible."

"I know. But I didn't play favorites. I tried to plant the idea in the lawyer's head that Mr. Dooney has a kept woman on the side—Fifi LaTorche."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I know. Why aren't I?"

"Goodbye, Jack. I love you."

"I love you too. Stay out of drafts and don't let Aunt Mehitabel push you off a cliff."

"I'll be home Wednesday."

"I'll be looking forward. Pick me up at the jailhouse."

He hung up, then snapped his fingers. A new thought had come to him.

He'd better hurry—the cops should be here in a few minutes. He went to her bedroom, grabbed a bra and a pair of stockings from the bureau; slid the rear glass door open, ran in the back door of the garage; got his shovel, ran to the patch of earth, dug quickly, shoved the bra and stockings into the hole, and covered them up. He ran back to the garage with the shovel. Then he sauntered into the kitchen, washed his hands, and hummed in a satisfied way.

They would dig up the items, and their interment wouldn't make any sense, but that was all right; the men wouldn't want to have wasted their time in fruitless digging, so they would attach some kind of sinister significance to what they had uncovered. Bras and stockings always convey a message, and are nice to come upon unexpectedly. So everybody would have a good time. And wasn't that what life was all about?

The door chime rang. He ran to open the door. Standing outside were Dooney, Mr. Hector, and two other men; one of the two was

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a uniformed policeman, the other looked like a plainclothesman.

Dooney looked firm but a little apprehensive. Mr. Hector looked righteous and retributive. The other two looked like men on a job.

Moorman cried heartily, "Hey! You came back!" He swung a jovial hand, to hammer Mr. Hector's shoulder affectionately; Mr. Hector twisted away. "Hey, all right! How are you, Chief?" He was beaming at the policeman. "Y'all come in, heah? I got plenty of salami—no wine left, though. Stoop, do us a favor, will you?" He thrust bills at Mr. Hector, who drew back. "Run down to the store and pick us up a couple jugs of wine . . . No? Okay, we'll have to do without. Come in, guys . . . Lisa," he called, "some guys have stopped by . . . No, I forgot. She's asleep."

Mr. Hector glanced at the plainclothesman. He and the policeman were gazing fixedly at Moorman.

Mr. Hector said, "You told us she was visiting some relatives."

"What? Yeah, sure. Of course I did. I forgot for a moment. Yeah, that's where she is. She's away. Visiting some relatives."

His face seemed suddenly ashen. They were all looking at him intently.

His eyes slid away from them. He turned his head and looked out the window.

Their gaze followed his. They all stared out the window, at the patch of fresh-spaded earth at the end of the lawn.

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a *NEW* detective story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

Sergeant Jeffrey Peckinpaugh ("Peck") is a small-town cop in the town of Clausen. The small crimes that happen in a small town are not necessarily small to those concerned, and Peck has the head and heart to understand the mixed feelings and especially the conscience of a "little man with honest eyes." Then too, it is so much easier for a cop to become emotionally involved in a small town. . .

FINDERS WEEPERS

by ERNEST SAVAGE

If anybody other than Gully Sampson had found the $5040 in a paper bag on East 9th Street, probably none of this would have happened; but since Gully did find it, I suppose the course of the succeeding events was inevitable. Unless any other cop than I on the Clausen force had talked to Gully that Thursday afternoon—

He'd found the money the preceding Friday, then spent Saturday and Sunday in an agony of indecision over what to do about it, deciding finally to place an ad in the Monday edition of the *Clausen Press-Sentinel*, under "Personals." The ad read: "I found a substantial sum of money in an unusual container on East Ninth Street near the intersection of Forsythe Boulevard last Friday afternoon. If the person who lost it can identify it properly, he can have it back. Or she. Minus the cost of this ad and certain other expenses. Respond to P.O. Box 152."

As composition, it probably wouldn't have got an A from my girl friend Bonny Johnson who teaches English and Phys Ed at Clausen Central High, but its message was clear and it drew seven answers.

Sampson was a small wiry retiree in his mid-sixties with a

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well-weathered face in which honest-looking but worried brown eyes couldn't seem to stay still that Thursday afternoon. They shifted from the sign on my desk, which read: "Sgt. Jeffrey Peckinpaugh," to Lieutenant Wells's open office door behind my back, to the ceiling corners of the tall old squad room, to the door on the left through which he'd diffidently entered a few minutes before, and then back again to my desk. A blue baseball cap in his white-knuckled hands was dead from strangulation.

Five of the answers to the ad were from people who thought it was some kind of contest; the sixth was from the office of Deputy District Attorney Willis Murfe, advising boxholder 152 he was in rascally violation of the law; and the seventh, a honey, read as follows: "That's my money, buster, and I want every damn dime of it! It was in a brown paper bag so set up a meeting to give it back—or else!"

All the words in the message except "buster" and "damn" were cut-outs from magazines. Buster and damn were written in crude block letters with a ballpoint pen. There was no signature and the postmark on the envelope was local.

"Listen, Sergeant," Sampson said earnestly, "I didn't know anything about that law. Honestly."

That's why he'd come to the station—the letter from Murfe had scared him almost as much as the letter from the other guy. You're supposed to turn found money in to the police, and only if it's not identified and claimed within 30 days does it become yours. Almost nobody knew that, not just this likable little man. But Deputy D.A. Murfe is something of a joke around the department, more pest than threat. He's the kind of D.A. who'd prosecute you for ring-around-the-collar if he could. I told Sampson to relax.

I'd seen him around town a number of times, his hallmarks that battered baseball cap, levis, a denim shirt, and a Hefty bag over his shoulder, lumpy with beer cans and other unsightly items picked up along the streets. It was his "contribution" to the town he'd been born in and loved, he said; Clausen, suffering from growth these past ten years and the ugly symptoms of growth—crime as well as junk in the gutters. "It's all I can do," he said. "Besides, I make a buck now and again and I need every one I can get. But this thing—wow! I never saw that much money before in all my life."

"You married, Mr. Sampson?"

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It startled him. "Hoo boy, you betcha!" An uncensored answer. "That's why I spend so much time outside," he added, those good-natured honest eyes finally settling on mine. "I hate a rainy day. Her name's Millie."

He'd found the money on Friday afternoon in the gutter—loose bills, twenties, fifties, and hundreds—and taken it home immediately. He'd counted it, then put it back in the bag and hid the sack in an old fishing-tackle box he kept in his workshop behind the garage, where it still was. Then the agonizing—

He could use the money for any number of things—a new roof, or a new used car, both badly needed, a new furnace, insulation, any number of things. But his mind's eye—equally good and clear—saw a little old lady losing the money while hobbling home from the bank with her life's savings, withdrawn to finance a critical operation for a dying grandchild, or some such thing. Conscience drove him to place the ad, but good sense told him to rent the P.O. box under a false name. He didn't want them pounding on his door. Above all, he didn't want Millie to know.

It was after four o'clock, and Lieutenant Wells, striding briskly past my desk now, cast an approving eye on me at my labors. My shift had ended at three, but Wells, who works 24 hours a day, eight days a week, it seems to me, has no use for such niceties of the civilian world as a regular quitting time, or a lunch hour, or a vacation; we were cops, we were different. The fight against crime was endless, and so was our job, he said. Wells the Warrior; hair, teeth, stomach, feet, all casualties in his 30-year struggle against an ever-increasing army of crooks. Instinctively I passed a hand through my own still-thick reddish-brown thatch, and sighed.

"Let's go take a look at where you found it," I said to Sampson and we both got up.

Ninth Street—before the East-West Freeway was built—was the main route through Clausen from Los Angeles to the desert. It is much less heavily traveled now than it was then and for that reason, probably, is in a shabby state of repair. The old Red-Line Inter-urban tracks cross 9th just before the Forsythe Boulevard intersection and the asphalt around and between them is crumbling away. Just west of the tracks a new bank had been built and I could understand Sampson's inner-eye vision of the little old lady losing the bag of bills as she picked her careful way home.

"Right there," he said, pointing. He was nervous, his eye scan-

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ning the street as though expecting the guy who'd written the threatening letter to spring out at him—a sensible fear. His anonymous communicant obviously had lost the money, and just as obviously had stolen it. The question now was—would he kill for it?

I watched a car slow down before bumping over the tracks, and an idea bumped across my mind, as though in tandem, rattling a bit like the car. Not a good idea, it turned out, not at all well-built.

I drove Mr. Sampson home. He lived on Pepper Street in the old central part of town, four blocks north of 9th. His front yard was as neat as I expected it to be and his street in general looked as though it were winning the fight for continued respectability, several of the old wood-frame bungalows freshly painted. His not, but needing it; another place for the windfall.

There was no sign of Mrs. Sampson as I let him out, but I could picture her behind that drawn front window shade, watching TV, rocking in her chair like the keeper in some nightmare jail-house. Something about Sampson suggested she was twice his size.

"Sergeant," he said, hanging on the door, "that guy who wrote the funny letter—is there any way, do you suppose, he could find me? I mean, I used a phony name to rent the box and all—"

"I don't think so," I said. I'd thought about it the way a good cop should. "He could identify you only if he saw you pick up the mail from the box, and if he'd done that, you'd have heard from him before this. Don't worry about it, Mr. Sampson."

"Well—okay," he said doubtfully. Then he smiled. "I'm glad I came in to see you," he said. "I feel better about it now."

I smiled back at him, liking him more by the minute. I'd driven him home primarily to pick up the money from his tackle-box, but changed my mind in that friendly instant. It was another mistake and I knew it instinctively, but somehow—quixotically—I didn't want the money to leave his honest hands, didn't want it tangled up in some bureaucratic web, possibly forever. Besides, most people would have kept it without a second thought to begin with, little old lady or no—and I wished now that *he* had. I felt a powerful surge of warmth for him as he turned and walked—warily, it seemed to me—up his drive.

I was back at the station at 5:30 and Wells was still there as I came into the squad room. He bathed me with a radiant smile, but I spoke first.

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"Just think," I said, "almost three hours past my quitting time, and poor Bonny alone with a beaker of martinis. For two. She tells me I just don't know when to stop working."

"Why don't you marry the girl," he said, "and then your time'd be your own."

"You mean *yours*, don't you, Chief?"

He had no knack for banter. "What're you working on?" he said.

"A motorcycle—!" I snapped my fingers.

"What?"

"The guy must have been on a motorcycle." I stared at the stained beige wall across the room as Wells shrugged and walked away. "He hits the potholes where the tracks cross Ninth," I went on out loud, seeing the thing happen, letting it grow now, "and the bag pops out of his saddlebag. In his haste to get away from the scene of the crime he fails to strap the saddlebag properly and it works open. He probably made the hit in L.A. somewhere and was on his way east, maybe to Palm Strings or Vegas, for a bang-up weekend."

My voice trailed away. Wells was in his office now, other things on his mind. I could see a sandwich and a milk-shake container on his desk. Dinner.

Sampson had found the bag a little after 3:00 P.M. on Friday. That meant the hit had been made, probably, sometime after lunch, depending on where in the sprawling L.A. basin the bank was located. It had to be a bank, I thought, considering the denominations of the bills—and wondered just how thrilled Bonny would be with all these brilliant cocktail-hour deductions. I'd dropped by the station only to pick up a book to take along to her place, and here I was making like the start of a shift.

I called her and told her I'd be late and she advised me the information was redundant. She also advixed me that she'd had both of her martinis and the first one of my two—and that's the formula for dynamite. She had a tolerance for about one-and-a-half of the things. I shuddered.

In the communications room I pulled the L.A. area bank-robbery reports for Friday last and found six, about average. Two were out at once—less than a thousand taken; and one was over ten. Three were in our range—around five; close enough, I thought, and should have left it at that—an attractive, but untested theory.

Instead, I called L.A. and put in a request for complete details

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on the three, plus any usable photos the banks' monitoring systems may have produced. When I finally left the station, Wells was lighting his after-dinner cigar, and when I got to Bonny's, she greeted me with two choruses from "Annie Get Your Gun," her right forefinger shooting me dead. Some broad. Some boss.

Sometimes I wish that forefinger had been loaded.

Lieutenant Wells said, "Okay, Peckinpaugh, what about this motorcycle thing? There's nothing here in the reports about a motorcycle thing." He riffled showily through the papers on his desk, eyes narrowed. He's got a mind like a swamp—drop something in it and it stays forever.

Escalera and Findley were with me in Wells's office a little after seven the next morning, Friday. We'd gone through the current stuff—a murder in the Chicano section of town that Escalera was working on, and the usual half-dozen thefts and assaults that Findley had on his plate. I had finished a tough murder case yesterday afternoon just before Sampson showed up and was feeling fairly smug about things. Until those eyes—red and mean from 30 years of short sleep—fell on mine.

"Well," I said reluctantly, "I think I've got a lead on an L.A. bank holdup. I think the guy used a motorcycle. Maybe."

"L.A.?"

"Yessir." L.A. was a foreign country to Lieutenant Wells—which is why I mentioned it. I might just as well have said Spain. L.A. exported crooks and smog, all of which ended up here, according to him, and it should be walled off like East Berlin. "I should get a package on it this morning," I added weakly.

Wells looked at Escalera. "Luis, you need help on the Mendez murder?"

"No," Escalera said. "I doan need no help, I need luck." Escalera was the only man on the plainclothes squad who could penetrate the macho-maze of the Chicano community and he usually worked alone.

"Well, if you do," Wells said, "call on Peckinpaugh."

It was a dismissal line, and we all got up and walked out, me very glad not to have had to mention Sampson. One or two more questions from Wells and he'd have had the whole story and I'd be on my way out now to get the money from Sampson's tackle-box and maybe even arrest him. Wells was like Murfe—both bookmen to the last page.

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I got good stuff from L.A. I got verbal descriptions of the three men I was interested in and a varied assortment of pictures from the banks' monitoring systems. None had been caught yet, and the leads were few. One of the suspects was black, the other two white. One of the white men was wanted for parole violation as well as for another bank holdup a month earlier. The package from L.A. contained a rap-sheet on him as well as process photos from his arrest file, and a good bank photo of him on the occasion of the month-old holdup. His last known address was in Central L.A. He was considered armed and dangerous, and Sampson would be meat for him.

I looked up Sampson's phone number and dialed it. His wife answered and I jerked the phone away from my ear at her first word. She sounded like the Godfather in drag—and mad.

"Is Gully there?" I said cautiously.

"Who is this?" she snarled. "Is this Charley? He doesn't want you to call him any more, Charley."

"No, this is Pete," I said, grabbing at a name.

"Pete who?"

"Just Pete. I'm a friend of Gully's."

"Gully's got no friends."

"Well, look, lemme talk to him."

"He ain't here," she said and hung up, and I unclenched the phone as though it were a smoking gun. Hoo boy, indeed! I thought. Poor Gully.

I found him on Forsythe Boulevard near 7th. He had stepped up to the sidewalk and was talking to a woman who held a small child by the hand. He pointed north as though in answer to a question and the woman nodded and walked away, Gully tipping his peaked cap and giving her a slight bow. The woman was smiling, the child staring candidly back at Gully the first few steps, the way kids do. I parked and watched him for a while as he worked the gutter. He didn't take just the cans and bottles, he took everything—paper, junk, everything. His plastic bag was bulging, but another, still folded, was hanging out of his back pocket. He'd probably fill them both before going home.

I liked the man. He had resilience; he could cope, adapt. He couldn't live in the house with that wife of his, so he lived in the streets—and the streets were the better for it. A Johnny Appleseed of trash.

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I should go away and leave him alone, I thought. No one but me knew he had the money and I could let the whole case just slide away, like so many others. His name wasn't on the record, he'd rented the P.O. box under an alias, and the guy who'd written the tough letter didn't know who he was.

But *he* knew; Gully knew, and that was probably the rub. He'd fought his conscience for a while and then done the "right thing."

Well, it would have to be up to Gully, I told myself. I had a plan that I thought would work, but it would have to be up to him if we used it. Otherwise, we'd drop the whole thing. I honked and he came over and got in the car, his good clear eyes steady on mine today, and smiling.

"I talked to your wife," I said, and watched the smile die.

"Oh?"

"On the phone." I couldn't equate this gentle old man with that snarling virago voice. "It's none of my business," I said foolishly, "but—?"

"I know, where'd I meet her and why'd I marry her?" He sighed hugely. "Most people wonder. It was during the war in Connecticut. I was in the submarine service there. She was a different girl then, Sergeant."

I was sorry I'd asked. There was no self-pity in his voice or eyes, but the pain of an old raw wound was still evident.

"I've made a decision," I said briskly to change the mood. "We're going to drop the case. You're going to lay low and keep your mouth shut for about thirty days, Gully, and then quietly begin to spend the money—paint your house, maybe, get that new used car you need."

He wasn't ready for it and didn't like it. He was the kind of man who stuck to his decisions, especially the hard ones. "How come, Sergeant?"

I explained the situation as I saw it, not glossing over the various illegalities involved, but telling him he had no one to fear if he played his cards right, not even Murfe.

He was frowning. "It's stolen money, though, isn't it?"

"I think so, Gully. I think it was swiped from a bank in L.A."

"Do you know who did it?"

"No, but I think we can smoke him out if we try. With luck, we can."

"How?" He looked at me with quickened interest. "You said 'we'."

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"Well, it would involve you if we did it, but it's up to you if we do it at all, Gully. As far as I'm concerned, the case is closed, the money's yours."

"Would it be dangerous—to smoke him out?"

"More for him than for us."

"How'd we do it—I mean *if* we did it."

"Well, we'd respond to his demand to set up a meeting," I said. "We'd put an ad in the Personal Column of the *Press-Sentinel*. Something like this: 'Dear Paper Bag: It's all yours if you'll meet me at Shelley's Coffee Shop in the Clausen Mall at three o'clock Saturday afternoon. Wear something red.' You'd be the guy he'd meet," I added.

"You think he'd read it, Sergeant?"

"He read the first one and he'll read this if he's still around. Crooks use the personal columns the way you and I use the phone, Gully. You game?"

"Yes, I am." Spoken firmly. "What'll *I* wear?"

I laughed. "Your usual clothes—nothing flashy. The baseball cap—" He had it on and it made him look as innocent as Charlie Brown. But there was iron in his old bones; the submarine service doesn't take Charlie Browns.

"Where'll *you* be?" he said, and I laughed again.

"In Shelley's at a table near yours. I'll have a girl with me. We'll look like we're in love. Don't pay any attention to us—that's important. Okay?"

"Okay."

"You get there about quarter to three and order a burger, or something. Dawdle over it—he may be late and he'll case the joint if he's got any sense. But I'm betting a lot of my time he'll be there."

"What if something goes wrong?" It was an old man's second thought; ten years ago he wouldn't have asked.

"Nothing will," I said. "He'll either show and I'll nab him, or he won't show at all." Sure, I thought. There were plenty of things wrong with the Sampson case already and here I was adding steadily to that number. First, I should have sequestered the money at once or dropped the case entirely; second, I should have made a full report to Wells; third, I shouldn't be setting up a trap with a civilian as bait without all kinds of permission; fourth, I shouldn't involve another civilian, Bonny, as I was planning to do; and fifth, I should have the L.A. police in on the setup since the

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suspect was their man, not mine. Only Gully was mine.

But in for a penny, in for a pound, I thought recklessly—and I suppose, typically. I'm a good cop, I think, and I'd rather be a cop than your average millionaire, but I've got this dangerous tendency—Wells tells me—to ignore the book, to go straight to the place marked "X". Sometimes the law isn't quite as big as the people caught in its mesh—a heresy I find myself comfortable with.

"Nothing," I repeated in round firm tones, "will go wrong."

"Then let's do it," he said.

"All right, Gully, but on one condition."

"What?"

"If it doesn't work on Saturday, we drop it."

He looked squarely at me before he said, "Somehow it's important to you that I keep the money, isn't it, Sergeant?"

"Yes. I think it can do you more good than anyone else in the world.

"But it's the bank's money."

"The bank's insured."

"Which makes it everybody's money, so to speak—is that the idea?"

"Right, Gully. And what's everybody's is nobody's."

"That's what they call a sophistry, isn't it?" he said carefully, and I couldn't help grinning again. Bonny, the English teacher, would have liked that word.

"Yeah, Gully, a sophistry—but okay?"

"Okay—I guess."

After leaving Sampson, I put the ad in the *Press-Sentinel* and had lunch at Shelley's in the Mall. It was busy; but I'd been there on Saturday afternoons when nobody was there but me, and that's what I hoped would be the case tomorrow.

I was fidgety, increasingly aware of the length of the limb I was out on. It doesn't pay to "like" people in a case, to become emotionally involved; you lose your judgment and perspective. But all the dice were cast now and I'd have to live with whatever numbers came up.

From Shelley's I called Escalera at the station. "Luis," I said, "until noon tomorrow I want to help you on the Mendez case."

"I doan need no help," he said.

"Yeah, I know, but *I* do. Is Wells there?"

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"Wells is always here."

"Tell him you need me, okay?"

"Sure, why not? We can ride around together and look strong."

Bonny and I were at a table in Shelley's at 2:30 on Saturday afternoon, and were alone there until Gully arrived at 2:45. Once inside the door he looked directly at me, his eyes anguished with worry. He made a little gesture with both hands, but I turned him off with a hard frown and he sat down at a table for two in front of ours, his back to us. He should have known better than to recognize me, but on the other hand I should have known better than to use an old man as bait.

"Jeesh!" I said softly.

"He looks scared," Bonny said. "And sweet. I see what you mean about him, Peck."

I'd told her the whole story and she'd approved heartily. Her one worry about me as a cop was that the milk of human kindness would ultimately sour in my breast—which it may yet do.

Gully ordered a sandwich and coffee and sat there quietly, waiting, his shoulders slumped. He was dressed in clean street clothes and had gotten a haircut since yesterday morning. The baseball cap was in his lap, probably being strangled to death again.

At 2:55 I told Bonny it was time we went into our act, and she brought a bunch of Polaroid pictures out of her purse and began showing them to me, accompanied by a line of patter. I'd cut the pictures I had of the three suspects to Polaroid size, glued them to cardboard backs, and mixed them with the others. The idea was to make a good identity on the suspect without attracting his attention. My .38 felt heavy as a brick under my jacket.

Bonny was good. She was enjoying the excitement of it. It was the first case I'd ever drawn her into—and would be the last, but she didn't know that. "And this is mother," she said, digging me in the ribs, "taken in front of her office. She keeps asking when you're going to make an honest woman out of her daughter."

Two teenagers came in and sat at the counter and at 3:00 on the dot our man arrived. He was the one I thought he'd be, the parole violater, and looked tough as a railroad tie. A red bandanna was tied around his neck and the angle I had on his face was almost the same as in the picture the bank had taken. His name was Williams.

He walked straight to Gully's table and sat down facing him. I

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gave him a moment to settle in his chair, then got up with the luncheon check in my hand, and began moving casually toward the cashier's stand by the door. Williams's hands were on the table as I went by—and that's all I needed to know. Two steps past him I pulled my gun, turned, and put the muzzle against his neck. "Not a wiggle, Williams," I said. "I'm a cop and you're under arrest." He said a dirty word softly and slumped a little as Gully closed his eyes and slid quietly off his chair.

I got to Bonny's apartment a little after 5:00. I'd arranged beforehand to have her take Gully there from Shelley's and wait for me; whereupon Gully and I would go get the money and turn it in—the necessary last step in the case.

Wells wasn't at the station when I booked Williams, a greater stroke of luck than I knew at the time. He always wants to know all about it right now, and there was no way I could have told him only part of it. Williams denied robbing the second bank—from which the paper-bag loot had come, but admitted robbing the first when I showed him his unmistakable portrait at the scene. I had the officer notify L.A. that we would hold Williams for them to pick up and then got out of there as fast as I could, itchy with relief.

Gully was drunk. He was well into his third beer when I got to Bonny's and he had a silly grin all over his face.

"Well, we did it!" I said heartily, thinking to brace him up after that fainting act. "Now we've got to go get the money, I'm sorry to say."

"Wait'll he tells you," Bonny said, herself all loose smiles, a nearly empty martini glass in her hand.

"Tells me what?"

"Tell him, Gully."

"The money's gone," Gully said. "I wanted to tell you at Shelley's but I guess you didn't want to hear."

"I don't want to hear now, either," I said grimly. "Gone where?"

"Millie took it. She took off, bag, baggage, and loot. Back east to her sister's, I guess. On her broomstick." He giggled. "Isn't that wonderful!"

"Gully, how'd she know it was there?"

"She knows everything I do, and always has. I should have known she'd know. She's got"—turned to Bonny—"what is it she's got?"

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"A basilisk eye," Bonny said. "She sees everything, knows all. An evil eye."

"Damn," I said. "When?"

"This morning, I guess," Gully said. "I was out all morning and when I got back at about one o'clock she was gone. Great, huh?"

He meant it. It was worth all the money there is to have her gone; it was his best possible buy. He looked happy as a bee in clover.

"Yeah," I said, and reached for Bonny's pitcher of martinis.

Wells likes a good solid arrest more than anything else in the world, especially if it's unexpected. Escalera had broken the Mendez case over the weekend and at the Monday morning meeting in his office, Wells was overjoyed.

Thank God for Escalera's luck, I thought, staying quiet. The Williams arrest was a footnote to the morning's proceedings; besides, it was an L.A. case, not ours, and Wells—out of pure disinterest—asked no awkward questions.

But questions will be asked farther along the line—lots of them. If Williams breaks down and confesses to the second bank job in L.A., the matter of the lost loot will arise, and the matter of who found it. And also, how come I arrested him in Shelley's?—as I expected Wells to ask that Monday morning. "How come Shelley's, Peck? How come you knew he'd be there?"

One of these days—as Wells has said many times—I'll learn to do things by the book and maybe become a *really* good cop.

Meantime, it's all in the hands of the gods, as it always has been.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 502nd "first story" of adult fiction to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . . The author's original title was "Explanation in Lieu of a Paper". . .

The author, Robert J. Cloud, is in his late fifties. In the 1930's he was apprenticed as a printer and is now foreman of the litho shop of Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington. Printing is in his blood—following in the steps of his father, uncle, cousins, brother, and sister. He served in SWPA in World War II—Australia, New Guinea, Philippines, Okinawa. He was married in his thirties and he and his wife are "now graced with four daughters." His hobbies include camping out, making jellies and jams, motorcycling on one of his daughter's bikes, making and solving puzzles. He "is a writer for love, a printer for money."

His greatest belief: "a firm conviction that every person's voice is important and should be heard." And remember, Mr. Cloud, every person's voice has a story to tell. . .

CREATIVE WRITING COURSE 205

by ROBERT J. CLOUD

Dear Miss Bennett,

This is submitted in lieu of the class paper due today. I know it's past the date for withdrawal from the course, but I hope when you've heard the circumstances you will be able to give me an Inc rather than F.

And please don't think I'm blaming the course or your teaching. I know you must be disappointed with me and my work. All my weekly papers have been A's or D's. It must be disheartening for a teacher to see someone with potential for A's who turns in such unpredictable work. But there is a simple reason.

It seems—I have been blinding myself to this all my life, but at

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last I have to admit it—I've always wanted to be a writer, but I've always lacked the creativity. There, it's said. I'm not a creator, but a reactor. Pull that "c" from the middle and put it at the beginning, and a great author is born. But it's easier on paper than in life. I've at last got to admit that one class, or a dozen classes, won't change my basic approach to life.

I had hoped—foolishly, I know—that CW205 could turn me around. Murray was the evidence. Before he took your class, he too was groping for direction. You remember how he went from C to B to A in just days, how easily he picked up your meanings, how he sent out—and *SOLD*—several of the papers he'd written as assignments for CW205. But he was your star. I know, because I recognized many of the "former students' papers" you read to us this year; Murray had shown me the originals.

I never told you this before, because I wanted to attain creativity on my own, not have it laid on me because of personal connections, but I asked to be Murray's roommate because of his writing reputation. And I've deliberately never mentioned knowing anything about the book he was writing all last year—that was published just this week. I've not seen the book—*My Lover, My Stranger*—but he showed me the jacket blurb.

"The brightest new talent to blaze across our literary skies in decades. . . Most poignant amalgam of love, lust, and loneliness since Carson McCullers. . . D. H. Lawrence up to date. . . The innermost passions of the secret heart, exposed with clinical objectivity. . ." You must be proud of him. I know he talked of dedicating it to you, so you'll probably get a complimentary copy.

Murray was sort of a hero to me, back in high school, so maybe there was a little coattail-hanging in the back of my mind when I enrolled here at the U. and followed along in the courses he had taken. And he did help me in a way, making me face up to the fact that it's creativity I'm lacking.

For I did use him. No, I don't mean having him write my stuff. Or even work with the plotting or the wording. I mean bouncing my ideas off him, hearing how they sounded, then going off in my bedroom to actually get it all onto paper. And I did use his typewriter—he'd bought a really great machine (portable, but with all the quality extras) with part of the advance from his book. Did you know that besides the fancy blurb raves they sent him a $5000 advance? They really liked that book.

Oh, I forgot to apologize for handwriting this paper. I know you

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insist on typing, but the typewriter is broken. Smashed completely. That's why only the heading is typed—I've had that part done for a week, since you gave us the assignment. But I've been trying to come up with some original mystery fiction so I could bounce it off Murray a while before finally typing it. And that's as far as I got, the heading.

You remember the A's you gave me. Those were on papers I could talk with Murray about. And on the D's you wrote "wooden characterization, artificial plot, too verbose; reliance on formula not imagination"—they were when Murray was away, once to his publishers, once to a debate tournament. He never gave me a plot line or suggested a word of dialogue; but he did listen to me and comment on my ideas, help me shape them, the sort of thing you do with all of us in class. But that's why I never got a C. You've told me I either seem to get it or miss it, with no middle ground.

So that's why I've got to withdraw from the class. And I hope you will give me an Inc rather than F, so I can get back some of the tuition money. This rooming suite with Murray costs much more than I'd thought back when I was a freshman in a single 7-by-8 room. And I won't be able to afford it on my own. And without Murray, the regular classwork alone will be too much for me to do and still try to get outside work to help pay for the room.

I'm sorry this comes so suddenly. Right after you'd praised my last piece, that 800-word problem-solving juvenile, and laid an A on me. It's no reflection on you.

Really, right up till this afternoon I was still hoping to stay on. Murray was in the sitting room working on notes for his next debate weekend; so I went in my little sleeping cubicle and was sitting there with a drawing board on my lap, trying to plot out a Mystery Fiction I could try on him. It's not all that easy. After all, I've been a juvenile, and an observor of nature's beauties, and that sort of thing; but a mystery? That's more of a specialized thing. Mysteries happen to detectives and lawyers—not to college sophomores. So I was doodling with phrases and drawings of knives and pistols, and trying to think of old Ellery Queen and Agatha Christie story titles, and getting sort of panicky.

So when the hammering on the outer door came, it almost jarred me off the bed. But Murray went to the door, and it seemed to be someone he knew, so I tried to shut my ears to it and work on the Mystery.

I said it was someone he knew, but they didn't sound at all

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friendly. A girl's voice said, "You!. . ." and Murray muttered something, and she said, "You—you swine!" (Definitely not friendly.) Murray mumbled again, but she broke in.

"You had the gall! The un-mit-i-gat-ed gall! to write it all down and think I wouldn't recognize it! Our story. . ." Murray mumbled for a bit, then she said, "Royalties—keep your damn royalties—I didn't come here for money. You owe me more than—" and Murray must have shushed her.

Then she said, "I'll bet that fancy six-hundred-dollar typewriter came out of that money. You'll get another girl and write another book and be a millionaire. . ." Murray mumbled along.

"I won't be quiet! Everything we've ever said, everything we've done, every thought we've shared—you spread it out like garbage in the sun—keep your hands off!" There was a scuffling sound, then her voice again, "No, damn you! You'll never make another cent with this typewriter!" and I heard a scraping noise like the portable being jerked across the table, then an explosive *Wham!* and then after a few seconds of silence, the door slammed.

I thought she'd thrown the typewriter at the wall, but it was Murray's machine and he was out there, so I stayed in my room. But it was very quiet now; I thought maybe he'd stormed out after her. And I needed to know whether the machine was usable, because this paper was due.

So I cautiously poked my head into the sitting room. No big marks on the wall or door. But on the floor—there was Murray, spread out like an empty bag in a pool of blood, his head smashed in. And the typewriter an absolute wreck.

So now I'm withdrawing. From class and from school. After I mail in this letter I'll go over to Administration and tell the Registrar I'm leaving, and see if I can get back any of the tuition and housing money I've paid. And they can probably tell me whom to notify about Murray. He sure makes a mess. They'll probably have to throw away the rug and repaint the floor.

You do see how I can't stay in school. Without Murray, my just-beginning creativity shrivels back to nothing. I'll probably never be a writer. And I'm sorry about cutting from the class. But you still have Murray as your shining example. Now *there* was a real creative artist.

Sincerely,
R. Joynter
Creative Writing 205

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 503rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . the story of a young woman raised to be always proper and ladylike . . .

The author, Kathleen K. Kunz, wrote her first mystery story as a student at the University of Oklahoma's 39th Annual Short Course on Professional Writing, directed by Jack Bickham. At the time of writing she was forty-two, "a retread coed seeking another degree, this time in journalism." Her chief interests, besides writing, are "backpacking and camping, designing needlepoint, and in the near future, hot air ballooning—if Oklahoma winds permit." She is married to an Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, and they have six children, one three-year-old and five teenagers . . .

IT WOULDN'T BE PROPER

by KATHLEEN K. KUNZ

Up to a point, Agnes Kaufman's Thursday unfolded like any other Thursday. Or Monday or Wednesday, for that matter. She had caught the 7:55 bus to the bank, then handled safe-deposit boxes until devouring her brown-bag lunch in the teller's lounge. Back to the vault, then home to mother at five. It was when she stepped off the bus that her life exploded.

She turned down Rockwell Street for the three-block walk past six apartment buildings so alike that only the courtyards contained any attempt at originality. A chipped fountain, a stagnant fishpond, rosebushes, a tree. She had heard a drunken neighbor complain once, loudly and obscenely, that he had missed his turn and fallen into the fishpond. Agnes had never come home drunk, not that she hadn't thought about it.

The man fell in step with her as she left the bus stop.

"Agnes Kaufman? Or should I say Gerber?" His loud plaid suit

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pulled at the chest as cheap suits will, the tie shouted, and the smell of stale cigar smoke hung on him like an overcoat.

"Go away, I don't know you." Her response was automatic—mother had warned her often enough about strangers—but this was not a mugging, or even a pickup. He knew her name.

"No, you don't know me, but I have lots of information about you, mostly from your daddy." The young man glanced down at her sharply. "He sends his love."

"Not likely. He's been dead for years. And I don't know any Gerbers." She walked faster, more annoyed than frightened.

"Don't worry, we have the right young lady. Ask mama when you get home. She won't want to tell you but she'll have to now. Tell her that's as far as it goes—if you both play ball. No one gets hurt, no one gets in trouble, no one does anything rash."

Agnes mustered her coldest look. "Do you get lost or do I call a cop?"

His mouth hardened. "Now that would be rash. It would mean a messy story in the paper that mama wouldn't like." He turned, touching a finger to his forehead in a sarcastic salute. "I'll be in touch."

She slowed her pace. Nervousness and the May heat had made her dress cling damply to her back. The unease she always felt with strangers ebbed. Mr. Lambert had told her just today that she was doing better with the customers. But for as far back in her 24 years as she could remember, "It's not proper" had been her mother's seal of doom for any overture Agnes had made to widen her social life.

A sudden shiver passed through her, making her blood feel cold. Was it the hint of danger or the idea of a loving father that caused it? She didn't care; it felt good.

She cut across her courtyard, checking the bagworms on the solitary tree and eyeing the telltale twitch of lace curtains on their living-room window. The buzzer was sounding as she reached the vestibule. Mother must hover at the window like a cat at a mousehole, she thought.

Sylvia Kaufman retreated from the door across the worn living-room rug. The doilies on tables and chairarms had been laundered and the smell of liver and onions pervaded—two sure signs it was Thursday.

"That's a good girl, right on time. Dinner's almost on the table."

Agnes didn't bother to answer, just began peeling off the sticky

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dress as she reached her room. She hung it by the window, barely glancing at the square slip-clad figure in the mirror. She rummaged in the closet for bermudas—mother had obviously hidden them again—and shrugged into a faded seersucker housecoat instead.

Her mother had started to eat by the time Agnes reached the kitchen.

"You took your sweet time, young lady."

"Funny, that's what *he* called me."

"Who?" Sylvia Kaufman peered over her fork at her daughter.

"The man who stopped me on the way home and told me my father sends his love," Agnes said, watching the effect this news had.

It was as if someone had opened a vein and let all the blood run out of her mother's face. Silence, then a long sigh.

"I want you to tell me exactly what he said."

Agnes recited the brief conversation, then looked at her mother. "Well? *Is* he alive? Why didn't you tell me? Didn't you think I'd care?"

"One question at a time, Agnes. Yes, he's alive. Do you remember him at all? You weren't quite five."

"I remember he had a mustache and something about a cat that used to scare me. Did he hurt my cat?"

"I don't think you ever had one. But that was him, a trim mustache and always the best clothes. He told me he manufactured pinball machines, but he was into everything illegal in Springfield. When the Mob moved in, his best friend tried to sell him out and he beat the man to death. Brutally. He was sentenced to die but they commuted it to a life sentence. I couldn't believe he'd do such a thing to me, and to his darling little girl."

Not to mention the best friend, thought Agnes, but she didn't interrupt.

"I sold the house and everything he'd given me, brought you here, and gave you my parents' name so no one could ever call you Frank Gerber's daughter. All these years we've been respectable and he's not going to change that. I'd sooner die." She sat sobbing quietly, her napkin fidgeted into a paper rope.

Agnes was filled with distress at this version. Of course her mother had known—Agnes vaguely remembered the lavish parties, the fur coats her mother had had. Racketeers who operated discreetly—and profitably—were tolerated, but having a jailbird

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husband definitely came under the heading of "unladylike."

"Why not tell me? When did you think I'd be old enough to decide if *I* wanted to see him?"

"I'd never let you go inside a prison! It wouldn't be proper."

There it was again, but Agnes knew it was an argument that could wait.

"Well, what do you think this character wants? Personally, I don't think he knows my father. It's just a threat."

"It doesn't matter; he knows us. You'll just have to do whatever it is he wants. You will, won't you? He said no one would find out?"

"But why should I?"

"To save our good name, Agnes! For heaven's sake, be sensible." She reinforced this last with a fresh flow of tears.

Plaid Suit fell in step with her as she left the courtyard the next morning.

"Mama tell you all about your daddy?"

"Enough. Just what is it you want from us? If it's money, you might as well go shout it from the rooftops. Anything we got from him is long gone and what I make wouldn't keep you and your pals in cigars."

"No, it's where you work that's important to us. We have the key to a certain safe-deposit box in your vault. It belongs to someone very well-known at the bank. There's no way any of us could pass for him, but the signature will be an excellent copy. I could write it in my sleep. And in the Friday afternoon rush you could be excused for mistaking a face. As far as your supervisor is concerned, the right key was shown, the signatures matched, so you'd be in the clear. Besides, what's in the box doesn't belong to him and he isn't likely to complain to the police."

Agnes disliked the oily assurances he kept coming up with. "Just who is this well-known person you're about to rip off?"

"You'll find out when you see the signature, but you don't have to know yet. Just treat me like any other customer and it will all work out. I'll have one final instruction when you get off the bus." He walked rapidly away, flagging a cab as she waited for the bus.

He takes *cabs*, she thought bitterly. What I ought to do is have Mr. Lambert call the police and tell them to pick him up when he walks in the door.

She daydreamed on the bus, envisioning all the girls surround-

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ing her with envious looks as the manager congratulated her for bravery. There might even be some sort of reward. Maybe enough for a vacation this summer. If only there were some family, a cousin or someone, where her mother could visit. Then Agnes could go alone. Who knows what might happen . . .

As she stepped off the bus, Plaid Suit sidled up to her, his voice just loud enough for her to hear.

"In case you have any idea of being little Miss Civic Duty, there's a friend of mine staying with your mother. He won't touch her if everything goes right and I call him on time. Otherwise it could be disastrous. He has a very bad temper—like your daddy. So just be a good girl and cooperate." He melted into the morning rush then, carrying her dream with him.

From the minute she entered the bank, time dragged. The chance look from Mr. Lambert became a knowing stare, the casual remark a trap to betray her. She couldn't touch her lunch so that when she finally spotted Plaid Suit, hunger pains accentuated the lurch in her stomach. He had changed to banker's gray, very respectable, and was examining a brochure on time deposits until her counter was free.

He strolled slowly across the polished marble to her counter beyond which the vault door yawned invitingly, put his briefcase on the floor, and smiled. She stared at the smile and saw it slide off his face as the head teller wandered over to her side.

"How are things going, Agnes? Getting the hang of it all right?"

"Yes, Mr. Lambert, just fine." Had she looked strange to him? She wanted to say, "Here's a thief—arrest him," but it would only get her mother killed. And that would be—the thought brought an hysterical giggle to her throat—unladylike.

"Well, help the gentleman. That's a good girl."

She turned helplessly to face Plaid Suit, unable to force words out.

"I'd like to rent a box—just a small one will do. Have to keep the kids' birth certificates in a safe spot. And the savings bonds. We buy one a month." He was running on, filling the silence.

"Yes, of course," she managed finally. She reached under the counter for a rental form. As she handed Plaid Suit a pen, she looked over her shoulder to Mr. Lambert, who was bent on being officious.

"Really, I can handle things just fine here," she said with her most confident smile.

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"Well, I certainly don't want to make you nervous," Lambert said, sounding offended but moving away.

Plaid Suit filled out the rental agreement. He carefully signed *Richard Burrows* on the form, on the new entry card, then on the daily ledger. Then with a casual flourish he signed *Norbert Milliken* on the next line of the ledger.

Agnes felt her knees weaken and she spread blunt fingers on the counter for support. Milliken was, as the Sunday business section described him, the latest star in the city's financial firmament. He had secured backing for the downtown renewal project when public money had dried up. For this he had been named to her bank's board of directors. What could he have in there that didn't belong to him?

She fumbled a set of keys from the "new boxes" drawer while he counted out cash for the rental fee. The entry cards for boxes in use were behind her in a file in the wall. If Mr. Lambert saw her open it now, would he wonder if she were confused and come over to help?

Her eyes found Mr. Lambert at the water fountain engrossed in one of Mr. Calhoun's obviously risqué jokes. Quickly she turned and pulled the Milliken card. She allowed Plaid Suit to forge Milliken's name a second time and compared it to the other signatures as she dated and initialed the card. The forged signature would have fooled Milliken himself! Slipping it under the ledger, she moved ahead of Plaid Suit into the vault. 715 was a large box on the lowest tier.

"Just use your key, then wait out front," Plaid Suit ordered.

Until some planned renovations were finished, the vault contained only one private room for users, and even that had no lock. Most customers used the open stalls with ledges.

She watched over her shoulder as he took the box into the room and closed the door. Only one customer waited for her as she reached the counter and boldly slipped the Milliken card back into the file.

"How are you today, Mr. Markovich?" She recognized him as the frail old man who came almost daily to fuss over the contents of his box. The paper work completed, she fetched the stool, and using both keys handed down his box from the top tier. Her heart leaped as she saw him turn and head for the closed door. He had it half open before she found her voice.

"Wait!" The word echoed off the wall like a ricocheting bullet.

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The old man hesitated, looking up at her through thick glasses. Beyond him she could see a strange tableau. The box was already closed but Plaid Suit was stuffing the last of many plastic bags of white powder into his briefcase. He slammed it shut quickly, brushed by the old man, and thrust the box, now much lighter, into her arms.

She stooped to rattle it into the proper slot and he bent over, reaching around her to lock the door, and whispered in her ear.

"You did just fine. Keep it up and mama will be safe in one hour. Don't forget, you won't look too innocent if they find out who your daddy is."

She sat down on the stool and watched his back until he reached the revolving doors.

Memories of her father flooded over her suddenly. Despite his sharp clothes and exciting "occupation," he had been a prosaic person, given to long boring stories and worn-out clichés. "There's more than one way to skin a cat." That was his favorite, the one that had always scared her.

Had she watched Plaid Suit light up his cigar outside the bank, she might have remembered another favorite: "Play with fire and you get your fingers burned."

Unfortunately, Agnes was too busy. She worked mechanically for the required hour, her mind planning feverishly, then pleaded a headache. Hurrying to the corner drugstore "for aspirin," she fished for change. She wouldn't call her mother now; it would mean listening to a tear-filled tirade. Besides, she wanted to see the look on her mother's face when she told her she was moving out. Agnes would send her something every month—that was only proper. At this, the laughter came boiling up.

There was only a quarter in her change purse. Never mind, she'd splurge. It would be a small symbol of her prosperous life to come. She dialed the number, convinced two secretaries that the matter was confidential, and finally reached her party.

"Mr. Milliken? I have some information about the contents of your safe-deposit box. If the price is right, we might do business . . . Blackmail? Why, Mr. Milliken, that term is so improper, so . . . unladylike. And you'll find that I'm a very proper girl."

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Mickey Lanford's first story, "Motivation in Any Language," appeared in the May 1977 issue of EQMM. As happens so often—nearly always—an author's second story turns out to be completely different from the first, in tone, plot, texture. In this instance Mickey Lanford shows a great advance on her first effort—no flight of fancy this second time around, rather a down-to-earth, even harsh look at a farmwoman's life . . .

GIVE US THIS DAY

by MICKEY LANFORD

The soothing aroma of baking bread permeated the old farmhouse. The woman savored it with appreciation as she put her sourdough starter away and tidied the kitchen. Breadmaking was the only thing she did now that gave her pleasure. She loved the touch of the dough and the release she felt when she folded and kneaded the resisting mass. It offered the only relief she ever had from the almost constant tension.

She worked quickly, deftly, with the ease and abstraction of long practise. She no longer noticed the age-blackened sink, the work-scarred counters, the curtainless window. There was no money for repairs, let alone "frills"—or so Wilbur said. Yet he had a new shotgun.

One thing the woman could not ignore was the shocking condition of her hands. She dried them painfully with the rough piece of sacking that served as a towel, gently patting the angry-looking skin, macerated by countless hours of hot water and harsh homemade soap.

Saponification of fat—that's what makes soap, she would think as she stirred a mixture of lye and wood ashes. Odd, the things that popped into her mind from time to time. Things from another time, another world. A world of books and flowers, of love and gentleness. How lovely her hands had been on that long-ago day

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when Sam slipped the wedding band onto her slim young finger. How could these possibly belong to her—these ugly, age-gnarled strangers? She simply tolerated them, as she did the face that now returned her stare from the only mirror in the house. That harshly terraced face, haunted and unsmiling, belonged to another woman—to Pearl Waterfield. The one reflected in her heart, the only one she claimed, belonged to Pearl Grayson—to Mrs. Sam Grayson. She sighed heavily as she lowered herself carefully into a decrepit chair.

A door slammed and Wilbur Waterfield's heavy boots tattooed the bare floors. Just the sound of them made her cringe.

"Git up thar, woman! Can'tcha see it's gonna rain? Come he'p me git them bales in."

The woman hastened to rise before he could hit her. Her arthritic hip still throbbed from yesterday's unmerciful kick. She moved quickly, wincing, but ignoring the pain. "Just let me get the bread out," she pleaded.

"Okay, but hurry it up." And he slammed out.

It was at the moment Pearl was lowering the steaming fragrant loaves to the counter that inspiration hit her with a near-physical blow. Of course! She stood stock-still for a long moment, a look of wonder lighting her tired face. Then she hurriedly covered the bread with a clean towel and hastened out.

Tonight! she thought, a vivid picture in her mind of every move. Tonight, while I can still function, before he gets me to where I can never move again.

She worked feverishly the next few hours, moving as though programmed, anxious to give him no cause for further abuse. Not that cause was needed.

The storm broke just as they returned to the house, the day darkening prematurely. Wilbur eased his grossly overweight bulk into the only comfortable chair and growled, "Gimme a beer."

Pearl opened two cans and brought them to him without a word. He looked up in surprise. "Hey, old lady, you're finally learnin'."

Oh, yes, she thought, I'm learning. I'm learning that pride and dignity have too high a price. I'm learning that making the best of a bad bargain is a road without an end. Yes, I've finally learned. Enough is enough. *Tonight!*

Her face betrayed nothing as she said stolidly, "Can't plow now. I'll just bake some more bread."

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Concentrating on her task, closing her mind to what lay ahead, she boiled some potatoes, mashed them right in the pan. Then she put them through a sieve. Nothing like potato water to give French bread that special flavor. She measured out the starter and the other ingredients, softened the yeast and made up the dough. She wanted no leisurely rising now, so she put the big bowl on a rack over a pan of hot water.

There was no television, no radio, not even a newspaper to read, but she knew Wilbur would stay right there until he had all the beer he wanted. It didn't matter that he'd turn mean—or worse, romantic—after the second can. At least it didn't matter tonight.

"I'll just tidy up in the back a bit before supper," she said, as if explaining something, and left the room. He merely grunted in reply. What she did outside the field and bedroom was of no interest whatever to him.

It required little time to clean the bedroom, empty the closet of its sleazy contents, clear the pathetic belongings from drawer and dresser top. The last thing to go into the big canvas bag was the photograph—the single decorative object in the house. She had defended it so fiercely that even he dared not insist she throw out "that clutter." Had it been his own son's likeness he doubtless would have felt the same.

The winsome baby face smiled at her and she found her heart could still turn over. How old would Johnny be now—24? 25? It was impossible to visualize him as a grown man. All she could see in her mind's eye was the pitiful little grave.

Old Dr. Sorenson was long dead now too. She could never forget his face when he demanded she tell the truth about the terrible injuries that had soon caused the death of her little boy. She had not dared to. The mute appeal in her face had infuriated him.

"You can't let him get away with it, Pearl! Don't you see—you'll be next! We need your evidence." His pleasant old face had wrinkled with concern and helpless anger at her terrified silence.

But couldn't *he* see? She had nowhere to go. Even if she did leave Wilbur, he would track her down to the ends of the earth.

The next time she was forced to enter a hospital, it was to learn that old Doc Sorenson was gone. His young replacement, ignorant of her background, accepted without question her account of a "dreadful fall down the cellar steps." By the time she had recovered from surgery and all the fractures had healed, she knew she could never have another child. The knowledge came as a relief.

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Now all the bitter memories, time-faded, were packed in with that small photograph.

She took extra pains with the meal. He was entitled to that. Even a condemned murderer got that much consideration. Although she didn't see how he could eat on top of an hour's swilling.

The one thing on which she had been undecided—when—was soon determined for her. Deep in her thoughts, she had not heard his approach and was unaware of his closeness until she was caught from behind and lifted in a bear hug. She almost cried out with the pain of her right arm, so viciously twisted in yesterday's encounter. To her dismay unwanted tears sprang to her eyes. It would please him that he had hurt her again. She forced herself to go limp so that he had to release her. When she turned, she had the bread knife in her hand . . .

Pearl listened to herself humming and considered how long it had been since a happy sound of any kind had been heard in that house. The music she loved, the plants she enjoyed, the pets who could have given her companionship had all been denied. To Wilbur they were "time killers." But how could she feel so gloriously free, so gay and light-hearted when she had done such a dreadful, dreadful thing? Oh, yes, she knew it was wrong. "You're a naughty, naughty girl, Pearl, a naughty, naughty girl!" The singsong made her giggle. My, she felt good! Well, there were things to be done.

The knife was carefully cleaned. The mass of dough came out of the big bowl, was punched down and divided in two. Each half was carefully fashioned into a large rectangle, then rolled into a fifteen-inch-long cylinder. She took special care with the second one. As she rolled the ends between her palms to taper the points, she thought it was just about the prettiest loaf she'd ever made. Funny, she expected it to look different. Well satisfied, she set them out to rise again after slashing the tops. Then she took up sweater and lantern and hurried down the road to her neighbor's and the nearest telephone.

By the time she got back, slipping and sliding on the muddy path that led off the back of the hill, she saw the sheriff's car at the side of the house and knew young Benjamin would be inside waiting for her. The door was never locked. She stood for a moment, catching her breath, watching the hypnotizing movement of

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the revolving red light, gathering her thoughts.

As she entered her kitchen she threw just one quick glance at the sheet-covered mound, then the powerful young man caught her thin shoulders as she swayed and seemed to sag. He lowered her gently into the rocker, his face full of compassion. "I got here soon as I could, Miz Pearl. You okay?"

"I'm all right," she managed, choking a little on the words. Suppose he knew I almost laughed out loud then? she thought wildly. She closed her eyes, lest he see the emotion reflected there. Her own chair! After all these years she could once more sit in her own chair. Never the time to in the daytime and never allowed to in the evening. Now it was all her own once again.

"You've been through such a lot," the kindly voice continued, "but can you tell me what happened here?"

"Some man," Pearl began, "a stranger passing through. He asked Wilbur for work and when Wilbur said there wasn't any, he just wouldn't go away. 'There must be something I can do,' he kept saying. He got real persistent. I would have given him a bite, but Wilbur wouldn't have it—just wanted him to leave." She stopped for breath, then rushed on, the words rolling out like marbles spilled from a bag. How easily the lies came!

"Wilbur got real angry then. You know his temper. I stepped out—you know, out back—for a minute. Not only because I needed to, but because I was afraid they would fight. I could hear Wilbur shouting. Then all of a sudden it got real quiet. I supposed the man had just left, but when I came back in, Wilbur was like . . . like that." She choked back another laugh.

"I hate to ask you these things now, but we got to know," young Benjamin said. "Looks like he used a knife. Did you see a knife?"

Pearl widened her eyes theatrically as she looked around, enjoying the dramatics. "My bread knife," she cried. "It's gone! I had it right out here on the counter, ready for supper."

"That's it, then," the sheriff said. "Guess he took it with him. We may never find it now. We'll have to wait for daylight before we can search anyway. Can you tell me what he looked like?"

Pearl hesitated. "Well, I really didn't pay that much attention, but I think . . ." Her imagination didn't fail her, although a description had never occurred to her before. She easily conjured up a nondescript transient.

"That's about it then," the sheriff said. "Now, how about you, Miz Pearl. You're not going to stay here alone, are you?"

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"No," Pearl answered. "Mrs. Moore told me when I went to telephone that I could come down there. In fact, I guess I'll just stay with her. She's been needing somebody to help with her mother for a long time."

"I'll drive you down there then, soon's the ambulance gets here from town to—well, to take care of things," he finished lamely. Murder was uncommon in that area and this was his first.

Pearl threw him a startled glance. She had counted on going to the Moores' alone. Now, how was she going to . . .

She said firmly, "Oh, that's all right. It's not that far." But he was firm too. "No trouble. I'll feel better delivering you safe to the door. I don't really think that character will hang around, but he knows you saw him."

They spent the next few minutes avoiding each other's eyes, listening to the steady tick-tock of the old wall clock that Pearl had brought with her to her second marriage. I'll come back for that, she thought. There's nothing else here I want. She could visualize the clock hanging on the sunny wallpaper of the Moores' cheerful kitchen. She could see the bright clean linoleum and old Shep lying on it in the place reserved for him by the stove. What a welcome she'd get from him! And with all those cats around the place, maybe they'd let her have one of her very own. She hugged herself ecstatically at the very idea. "Cold, Miz Pearl?" Benjamin's voice broke in on her thoughts, jolting her back to the present.

"No, no," she assured him. "I'm all right." I'm more than all right, she thought. I'm fine!

She considered how his voice had startled her. She was so used to her solitary thoughts. Imagine having that fine Lizzie Moore to talk to *every day!* Wilbur never did allow time for visiting. She'd get so lonesome for another woman to neighbor with.

Then a thought struck her. She could sell the house now! It wasn't much, but it would bring enough to buy a few things she never could enjoy while Wilbur was alive. Maybe a phonograph, or whatever they called them now, and some records. Lizzie liked music too. And there'd be *time*. Frank Moore didn't have *his* women plowing and baling. There was a hired man to help him with that. Oh, she couldn't wait!

There was the sound of a vehicle outside, then doors slamming and footsteps on the porch. The ambulance had arrived quickly, considering it had to serve most of the county. Benjamin rose to usher in the attendants.

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Pearl drifted off into her reverie again, barely aware of their movements. They had all known her situation and she knew no show of grief was expected of her.

They were gone soon and Benjamin spoke to her again. "Guess we're ready now. Do you have everything you'll need?"

"I'll just put a few things in my bag," she said. No need for him to know it already held everything she owned. Or that it had been ready before he came.

She made a pretense of moving about her bedroom for a few minutes, then she returned.

As she entered the kitchen, she sniffed deeply. "Oh, my. The bread! I almost forgot."

It only took a moment to remove the two loaves and turn off the old butane stove.

"My, those smell good," young Benjamin said admiringly. "Wish my mother would bake that kind of bread."

Pearl turned to him on impulse. "Here, you take one of these."

"Oh, no, I couldn't do that," he protested.

"Please," Pearl begged. "I want you to. Besides, I have two more I fixed earlier. Look." She flipped up the towel concealing the two loaves she had taken out when Wilbur had hurried her off to the field.

"Well, if you're sure—" He was protesting only half-heartedly now, his eyes and nose full of that beautiful bread.

"Here," Pearl said briskly, the issue settled, "just let me wrap it for you. They're very hot. This one's prettiest. This one's for you. You've been so kind." She sounded almost girlish.

She saw sympathy and admiration reflected in his eyes. He gripped her bird-boned shoulder gently but warmly. "You're something else, Miz Pearl. I sure hope everything works out all right for you."

"I'm sure it will, Sheriff, I'm sure it will." Pearl found herself smiling up at him. When had she last smiled?

She had just picked up the fresh loaf when panic hit her and she gasped in consternation. Oh, Lord, she'd forgotten! Which loaf was it in?

"What is it, Miz Pearl?" He was startled by her cry. "Burn yourself?"

She recovered quickly, gratefully picking up his cue.

"Yes, that's all. A bit too hot."

She examined both loaves intently as she wrapped them. She'd

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put *that* one on the top shelf of the oven, hadn't she? Oh, why didn't she think when she took them out. She'd been too pressured, and now there was no way to tell which was which. No way at all.

She squared her pathetically thin shoulders and looked up at him determinedly. "I'm ready now."

Before they got the doors of the squad car shut, the radio crackled. The sheriff listened intently, acknowledged the transmission, then turned to Pearl excitedly. "Did you hear that? I think they've spotted your stranger—down by the depot. Must have been one of those railroad bums. Tell you what. I'd better get back to the office right away, they're bringing him in. Okay if I drop you at the highway? You'll only have a few steps over to the Moores' house. Will you be okay?"

"That will be fine, Sheriff." Pearl could feel all her muscles relax.

She threw him a sidelong glance as she eased the big bag closer on the seat. He wasn't paying attention; he was too intent on the implications of the radio message. Both loaves vanished smoothly into the capacious canvas bag.

Just a few steps to the Moores' house. A few steps were all she needed. Two pale objects caught the moonlight as they disappeared almost soundlessly into the ravine. Her thrifty soul felt just a momentary pang at the waste, then she turned a lightened step toward the cheerful glow from the nearby house.

"Q"

The October 1978 issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale August 31.

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Cora was fifty-eight; she had spent most of her life looking after, caring for old women like Maude, and would continue doing so until Cora herself was old. Then who would look after Cora? It is an age-old question . . .

BELOW THE WOOD

by PATRICIA L. SCHULZE

"We used to dance in the upstairs hall. Mama had the maids wax until the floor shone like glass. Harry and I would waltz for hours. Mama didn't approve. She said I was fast and Harry would never marry me." The old woman laughed, a high squeaking laugh. "The floor was so slick. I remember one time we were waltzing and Harry slipped right by the head of the stairs. That's when I put up the gate, for safety when the children came."

Cora counted silently and slipped the stitches to the cable needle. She held it carefully behind her knitting and nodded encouragement to the old woman.

"How Harry loved to waltz. Even now, if I close my eyes, I can imagine myself whirling in his arms."

"Oh, dear. That was supposed to be held in front. I've twisted the cable the wrong way." Cora laid aside her knitting and smiled at the old woman. "Do you want to dance now, Maude? It's getting close to ten, but we have a little time before bed."

Maude nodded her tiny head eagerly and hopped up the steep stairs. Cora trotted after her and gently placed the needle on the worn record.

"Let me lead tonight, Cora, it's my turn," Maude chirped.

Cora smiled fondly as the thin arms encircled her stout body. They moved gracefully into the steps of the waltz. Once up the length of the hall and then back to the gate at the top of the stairs. As they performed their nightly ritual, Cora closed her

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eyes and let the music carry her out of the narrow hall. She felt a man's strong arms around her, her cheek brushing against rough tweed. She caught the faintest odor of pipe tobacco.

She pulled away and bustled through the bedtime preparations, overcome by shame at her betrayal. Just for a moment she had found herself in the arms of Maude's husband. She settled the old woman for the night. Smoothing back the hair from the withered forehead, she tried to assuage her sense of guilt. "Tomorrow we will pick some chrysanthemums from the garden and decorate the graves. You'd like that, wouldn't you, Maude?"

The old woman turned her head fretfully from side to side and plucked at the bed covers. "I guess so, Cora, if you want to."

Cora turned off the lights and slipped back down to the parlor. She eased herself into the big overstuffed chair by the fire and helped herself to a small brandy from the cut-glass decanter. She stretched out her swollen legs to the fire, still shocked at the way her imagination had taken hold of her. She must be more careful. What would Maude do if she ever suspected Cora's feelings about Harry?

Cora was 58, had spent most of her life looking after old women, and would continue doing so until she herself was old. Who will look after me then? She snorted at the idea. Medicare and Social Security will get me a bed in some warehouse for the dying until they carry me out in a pine box, but for now I have Maude and Harry—and the child.

Maude was 79, but gave no indication of dying, for which Cora was grateful. The worst thing about caring for old people was their dying. If she could just be sure of a few more years with Maude. So far it was working well. Young Dr. Borden had warned her that Maude was difficult. Cora didn't find her so. It was just that, for Maude, life had stopped in 1918, when first Harry and then the child had died. Not that Dr. Borden had told her these details—he might not even know them. Maude had been his father's patient until a few years ago when old Dr. Borden died.

Cora would have known nothing about Maude's past if she hadn't listened to the ramblings of the old woman when she thought no one was listening. That was how she found the graves.

Maude had a habit of backing away from direct questions about Harry and the child. But Cora had heard her mumbling about a grave below the wood. The next day Cora went for a walk. She cut through the stand of pine south of the house. At the bottom of

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the hill she found two depressions, marked by weathered stones. She searched the stones for inscriptions, but found none. There was nothing else around vaguely resembling a grave, so Cora set to work.

"It will be a nice surprise for Maude," she spoke to herself as she straightened the stones and pulled out the smaller weeds. "Tomorrow I'll bring a hoe and weed cutter. Poor Maude, trapped in that house without the strength to care for these graves. Wait until she sees what I've done."

A week later she helped Maude down the path through the wood. When they came to the clearing at the bottom of the hill, Maude looked around expectantly. Cora took her hand and pulled her to the spot she had so lovingly tended for the past week.

"Look at the graves, Maude. I cleared them for you."

"The graves?" Maude asked, bewildered.

Cora arranged the flowers she had brought and stepped back to survey her handiwork. "Now we can visit Harry and the child whenever you feel like it. We can bring flowers from the garden."

Maude looked at her strangely for a moment and then a curious smile played about her lips. "Yes, Cora, that will be nice." She turned away and started slowly back up the path. Cora hurried after her, bewildered by Maude's reaction. Then her common sense took hold and she understood. "It's just the shock. Poor dear, lying up there, unable to care for her dead. She's just overcome with gratitude."

In the weeks that followed, Maude seemed clearer, more in touch with reality than before. Cora thought that having the graves well tended again was a secret relief to her. Occasionally she would accompany Cora to the graves and consent to laying fresh flowers on them, always with the same curious smile. But more often Cora went alone, Maude pleading dizziness or some other excuse. After a while Cora began to regard the graves as her own special property and had to fight off a feeling of intrusion when Maude did accompany her . . .

Cora took up her knitting and began picking out the offending cable stitches. Suddenly her hands stilled and she stared in horror at the man's cardigan on her lap. "Oh, my lord! A sweater for Harry," she moaned. "What is happening to me?"

The sudden jangling of the bell in Maude's bedroom interrupted her thoughts and she hurried up the steps to turn down the heating pad at Maude's back. After settling her comfortably again,

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Cora went back to the parlor and savagely tore out the rows of knitting.

The next day Mrs. McCullogh came to do the heavy cleaning. They were in the kitchen, washing the windows, when Maude's lawyer and one of his colleagues came to the door. Cora showed them to the bedroom. As she was leaving, the attorney stopped her.

"Would you ask Mrs. McCullogh to step up here for a few minutes?" he asked. "I'll need her for a witness."

"Couldn't I do that for you?" Cora asked. "Mrs. McCullogh hates to be disturbed when she's working."

"That isn't possible, Cora." The attorney smiled. "There are legal reasons."

Cora sent Mrs. McCullogh to the bedroom. She picked up a cloth and finished the windows, pondering the lawyer's words. "Of course," she said, "a beneficiary in a will can't be a witness."

After the attorney and his companion left and Maude was settled in the parlor with a book, Cora slipped up to Maude's room. In a drawer in the bedside table she found a copy of the will. She scanned the usual bequests to charity, church, and old friends until she came to the body of the will. Her eyes widened and she caught her breath as the words leaped out at her. "And to my companion, Cora Stokes, I leave my house and the remainder of my estate, if she is still in my employ at the time of my death."

Cora put the will back in the drawer and hurried to her room. She lay down on the bed and tried to assimilate what she had learned. As the wonder passed she could think clearly of what this meant to her. No longer did she have to dread a lonely, poverty-stricken old age. This house and all that went with it would be hers. She might even be able to hire a companion for herself when the time came.

Her delightful thoughts were interrupted by the clanging of the hand bell that Maude always kept with her. Cora hurried to the parlor to search for Maude's reading glasses and to rearrange the pillows more comfortably at her back.

That afternoon Dr. Borden came to give Maude her weekly checkup. He stopped in the kitchen on his way out. "Well, our old girl looks pretty chipper today. You're good for her, Cora."

"She does seem to be feeling well. Some days I think we should change places, she has so much energy."

"She may outlive us all, Cora. Then again she could go at any

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time. She isn't quite as strong as she thinks she is and these dizzy spells aren't a good sign. Try to keep her from overdoing it."

"Oh, she takes it pretty easy most of the time. She only leaves the house to visit the graves, but I think that does her more good than harm."

The doctor paused with his hand on his bag. "Graves?"

"Harry's and the child's. The ones below the wood."

The doctor shook his head sadly. "Sometimes the only way to handle the old is to humor them. Just don't get caught up in her fancies."

Cora watched the doctor drive away, wondering what he meant. Oh, well, doctors like to be cryptic. She hurried with her tasks, then gathered flowers from the garden and went down the path to the graves. She did not ask Maude to go with her. Today, with her new knowledge, she wanted to be alone with Harry and the child with no name. Now, that was really a shame. No child should be buried without a name, she thought. When this is all mine I will have real gravestones put up, and I will choose a name for the child. Maybe Sarah. Very pleased with her plans, she went back to the house.

It was a week later that the highwayman came. He was an engineer from the State Highway Department, but when Cora heard his plans, she immediately thought of him as the highwayman. The state was widening the road past Maude's house. They were condemning a small strip of land below the hill.

"But you can't. The graves!"

The highwayman studied his map. "There aren't any graves shown on this property."

"Down there, below the wood."

Cora led him through the wood to the graves. He studied them for a moment.

"There's no problem," he said. "My men can move them easily. You just let me know where you want them and we will move them tomorrow."

Cora went back to the house very upset. How would this news affect Maude? It could throw her back into her vague state of a few weeks ago. She seemed to get upset whenever Cora mentioned the graves. How much more disturbing would be the knowledge that they were going to be moved?

She found Maude in the parlor, reading. She carefully broached the subject and felt let down, almost angry, at Maude's reaction.

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Maude looked up, marking her place in the book with her finger. "Whatever you feel is best, Cora. You handle it," she said, and went back to her reading.

That afternoon Cora found a new location for the graves, a small clearing just inside the wood. When the men came to move the coffins, Cora stayed indoors. She could not bear to see the sad remains of Maude's life, almost her own life, disturbed. A short time later the men came to the house with distressing news. They could find no coffins.

"No coffins at all, ma'am, and no bodies," one of the workmen said. "Just some old bones that could be dog or cat bones, it's hard to tell after this long. But they're not human."

Cora sank back in the chair, stunned. What could have happened to the bodies? Grave robbers? Not in these days. She ignored the ringing of Maude's bell. She could not go to her with this news. Dr. Borden would have to tell her. He would know how to break the news with the least amount of harm. Maybe he could give Maude something for the shock, and Cora too. After all, she was the one who had tended those graves so faithfully.

The doctor came right away and listened to her story in astonishment. "I should have told you. I warned you about getting involved in her fantasies—it never dawned on me that you didn't know. There are no graves. Maude was never married; there was no child."

He studied the shock on her face and tried to explain. "I don't know the whole story. My father was her doctor at the time and he destroyed all his records before he died. He thought he was privy to too many people's secrets and it was better if the secrets died with him. When Maude was twenty she shut herself up in this house and has never left it since. He never told me why."

After the doctor left, Cora lay on her bed. Slowly the numbness left and a feeling of betrayal crept over her. No Harry. No child. But hadn't she been warned now and then?—Maude's reluctance to visit the graves, her dissembling whenever you tried to pin her down about them. Cora remembered Maude's strange smile whenever she did visit the restored graves.

She's been using me, thought Cora. For two years she's been playing on my sympathy, knowing I would excuse all her demands, the constant ringing of her bell, leading me on with lies about her great sorrow.

Well, it won't go on any longer. I won't stick around to be a

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slave to that demanding old woman. She poured herself a drink from the decanter the doctor had brought to her room and lay back, letting the warmth of the brandy spread through her body. Her first anger passed and a feeling of loss shook her. Harry and the child were gone. They would never be completely hers. This house was gone along with a comfortable old age. What were the conditions of Maude's will? "If she is still in my employ at the time of my death." She could never stay and care for Maude now, not after discovering it had all been lies.

As her body calmed, her mind cleared and she remembered something Maude had said. Something about the dancing, the gate, Harry almost falling down the stairs before they put up the gate.

She went to the stairs and studied the gate. It was held by two screws that had pulled slightly away from the wall so that it hung down at a slant. She tugged on it and watched the screws move loosely in their holes in the wall. The gate would give at the least pressure. What if Maude were to have one of her dizzy spells, fall against the gate while they were dancing? If Maude died now, the house could still be Cora's.

She could never have Harry or the child, of course. But there was that lovely clearing in the wood. Wouldn't Maude want to be buried close to the home that had sheltered her all these years, with a loving friend to care for her grave? I would still have Maude, she thought, and even though she lied to me all this time I would still see she had a lovely grave. But before I do, I must tell her that I know the truth.

Cora baked a chicken for dinner, one of Maude's favorite meals. After dinner they sat in the parlor as usual. Just before ten they went up the stairs to the hall. Cora paused to adjust the record player.

"I learned something interesting today, about Harry and the child."

Maude moved into Cora's arms as the strains of a Viennese waltz filled the hall.

"You remember Harry. How you used to dance in this hall. And when Harry died you buried him below the wood beside your child."

Maude's eyes focused and bore into Cora's with a startling clarity. "What are you talking about?"

"The graves. You buried Harry beside the child down below the

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wood." The music moved faster and the walls spun by with a dizzying speed. "Only there isn't anyone in those graves, Maude. There never was anyone. There never was a Harry or a child. It has all been a lie."

Maude stopped dancing so abruptly that Cora stumbled backward. She stared at Cora and the strange smile twisted her mouth. "Belleau Wood. Harry died in France at Belleau Wood. They buried him there. I never saw his body."

Cora was still struggling to get back her breath as Maude continued, "The baby is under the cellar floor. I put her there after she stopped kicking." She moved closer to Cora, fixing her with a hypnotic stare.

"She was born the day Harry died. It took so long for her to stop kicking. I squeezed and squeezed; my hands were so tired. She kept kicking and kicking. Finally she stopped."

Cora struggled to break the icy spell that held her. "You killed the child? Why?"

Maude spoke in a still, calm voice. "She killed Harry. She made him go away. Mama was wrong. Harry would have married me someday. But when I told him about the baby, he left. He went to that war and he died. She killed Harry."

Cora stared at Maude and then her horror drained away and a great joy surged through her. "Then they *were* real—Harry and the child were real."

She closed her eyes and the faint odor of pipe tobacco reached her through the swelling music. She was just reaching out for the tweed-clothed arms when the gate gave way beneath the weight of her body.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

BOUCHERCON IX: The ninth annual mystery convention to honor the memory of Anthony Boucher will be held in Chicago this year. Conducted over the Columbus Day weekend (Oct. 6–7–8) at the Bismarck Hotel, the registration fee is $8.00 until August 31; $10.00 thereafter. The guest of honor and program have not yet been announced. Checks and letters of inquiry should be sent to Bouchercon IX, P.O. Box 2579, Chicago, IL 60690.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER: Although a wee bit tardier than might be wished, congratulations are no less sincere or deserved for: Robert L. Fish, elected president of the Mystery Writers of America; Donald Rumbelow, author of *The Complete Jack the Ripper,* elected chairman of the British Crime Writers Association; John le Carré, winner of the Gold Dagger from the Crime Writers for Best Novel of 1977 for *The Honorable Schoolboy;* and runnerup William McIlvaney, winner of a Silver Dagger for *Laidlaw.*

BETTER NEVER THAN LATE: Michael Dibdin's *The Last Sherlock Holmes Story* (Pantheon, $7.95) is a nicely written and cleverly plotted book, but it is grossly misguided. The cardinal rule of giving away no endings will not be violated here, but let it go at this: designed to surprise, or even shock, readers, this ending does nothing more than repel and revulse all those who admire the greatest of all detectives. The author, if not an out-and-out minion of the devil himself, must surely be one of the nefarious henchmen of the satanic Professor Moriarty.

BETTER BOOKS: Do not miss *Killed in the Ratings* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $7.95) by William L. DeAndrea. It is that rare combination of an old-fashioned puzzle told in a smooth contemporary style which indicates an infallible ear for language that is both articulate and witty. If the hero doesn't become a series regular it will be a major disappointment. Do not read *A Stranger Is Watching* (Simon and Schuster, $8.95) by Mary Higgins Clark unless you

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have recently had a physical examination and can be quite sure that your heart is functioning well. It is not often that a tale of terror can be as relentlessly gripping as this one is. It deserves its many weeks on the bestseller lists and is even better than her first mystery, *Where Are the Children?*.

BETTER AND BETTER: The most recent issue of *Xenophile* (#38) is entirely devoted to hard-boiled detective fiction. This ambitious fan magazine, beginning its fifth year of publication, continues to improve with each passing year. Devoted mainly to pulp magazines, most issues have something for mystery fans. This special issue (152 illustrated pages) is a steal at $2.00. Annual subscriptions (12 issues) are $6.00 (bulk rate) or $12.00 (first class). Send checks and inquiries to Nils Hardin, Xenophile, P.O. Box 9660, St. Louis, MO 63122.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Hollywood has more often than not pigeonholed its mystery movies into Grade-B categories, running them to formula. The less rigid European film industry, however, occasionally takes our genre and gives it refreshing new dress and sparkle. In the last few months France has exported to us two mystery films with all the pop, pleasure, and exuberance of newly opened bottles of good wine. Had America been the country of origin these would have been mere formula jobs, for their story roots are familiar and even *ordinaire*—but it is the Gallic fermentation which makes them both so unexpectedly joyous.

Claude Lelouch's lush *Cat and Mouse* is the murderous netherside to that celebrated director's highly romantic *A Man and a Woman*—the investigation of the killing (or was it suicide?) of a French millionaire set against eye-filling Paris backdrops, conducted by a dogged middle-aged policeman as intriguing as Maigret and at least twice as loveable. Inspector Lechat (played with gusto by Serge Reggiani) has definite kinks: he is not above occasionally mingling with the underworld—especially its ladies—and his faithful dog distressingly attacks innocent suspects. But he is determined to devote even his retirement to breaking this one last case... and without caution allows himself to fall in love with his chief suspect, the still beautiful Michele Morgan playing a widow over whom Frenchmen might easily kill. Mistresses, vanished art masterpieces, devious

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servants—all the trappings of the sophisticated Parisian romantic crime story are here employed with gorgeous style and wit, and when at the end of *Cat and Mouse* we discover we have perhaps been played with we hardly mind the tease.

Director Lelouch, who looks rather like one of his own romantic heroes, on a recent visit to the United States told EQMN: "I *love* mysteries. I read them all the time. I like mysterious *people*. Actually *all* my films are mysteries —for, after all, human relationships are the ultimate suspenseful puzzles, don't you think?" The French viewpoint.

Human relationships are also the heart of *Dear Detective* (directed by Philippe de Broca, who gave us *That Man from Rio),* in which a mild, middle-aged classics professor (a bearded, endearingly befuddled Philippe Noiret) finds himself literally mowed down by a stridently handsome woman who at first tries to conceal from him that she carries a revolver and is a lady police inspector (the attractive Annie Girardot in a spectacular performance). They become the most unlikely pair of star-crossed lovers, for he can think of no finer time than an evening of church music, while she never walks when she can run, commandeers squads of underlings, and is the celebrated apprehender of the "strangler of the suburbs," who now must track down who is assassinating,one by one,the membership of the French National Assembly! The clues to the killer will not tax your brain, but they *are* satisfying, and the underlying romantic pursuit will gladden your soul.

While the American mystery film seems increasingly to descend to drive-in-level violence, the Europeans appear these days to be turning away from darker realism (in which they once specialized) toward light-hearted elegance. Future reports in EQMN will chart this new direction—including first-hand news of a projected patrician new-period version of the Bulldog Drummond stories.

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INTERVIEW: JAMES GRADY

James Grady, an investigative reporter on Jack Anderson's staff, is the author of *Six Days of the Condor,* the chilling tale of a CIA operative whose terrified flight from professional killers was compacted via cinematic license in the film, *Three Days of the Condor.*

EQMM: Was there any real-life inspiration for the plot of *Six Days of the Condor?*

GRADY: The formation of the plot started when I was living in Washington, D.C., in 1971. The combination of my geographical location, plus the acquisition of bits of information on the CIA,

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helped to jell a lot of little ideas I had.

Two years later I was able to get the time to put them together and onto paper.

EQMM: If bits of the plot were based on fact, were any of the characters patterned after people you had encountered as a reporter?

GRADY: This occurred before my association with Jack Anderson. I had started working for state agencies after I got out of college and was still doing that when the book was written. Rather than saying that the characters were based on any individuals, it would be more accurate to say that they were amalgamations of people I'd known for a long time.

EQMM: Is your next book anything like *Six Days of the Condor?*

GRADY: My next book is not a suspense novel, but I had been preparing, for the book after that, an espionage novel. This was based on factual material I had gathered through sources connected with my work for Jack Anderson. Then I suffered a type of literary loss peculiar to the 1970s: my main source, who was the key to the "real" plot, left the covert world and is now trying to make it in Hollywood. I think he has my thriller idea locked up.

EQMM: Since you obviously can't do that particular thriller, do you have plans for another suspense novel?

GRADY: Yes. Since Ross Thomas has left Washington, D.C., no one is really making use of the city for mystery literature—not like it can be used. I'm developing a classic American mystery hero—a private eye—and setting him in D.C.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Anthologies of original short stories have long been a commonplace in the science fiction field, but in the mystery genre they have been relatively rare. For several years, such an anthology has appeared annually in Great Britain. In *Winter's Crimes 9* (St. Martin's, $8.95), it makes what I believe is its American debut.

Editor George Hardinge has made a fine selection of stories by a very distinguished group of writers. Some of them—including Colin Dexter, James McClure, John Wainwright, and Margaret Yorke—have been known in this country almost entirely as novelists, while others—such as Ruth Rendell and Patricia Highsmith—are familiar EQMM contributors.

There is one problem. At least two of the stories (by Elizabeth Ferrars and Celia Dale) have already appeared in *EQMM* or *AHMM* under other titles, a fact that probably should be noted by publishers presenting volumes of

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ostensible originals. With that slight *caveat,* the collection is recommended to devotees of the short mystery, which readers of this magazine surely must be.

**** Jacqueline Wilson: *Making Hate,* St. Martin's, $7.95. A monkey-masked rapist terrorizes a suburban English town, and civilian Scene-of-Crimes officer Simon Shaw, himself a suspect for a time, investigates. This is a very sensitively written crime novel with memorable characters and an ambitious theme. The subtle and troubling conclusion will stick in many readers' minds a long time after the book is closed.

*** Arthur Maling: *Lucky Devil,* Harper and Row, $8.95. In the third novel about the brokerage firm of Price, Potter, and Petacque, the mystery (involving the inordinate interest of various malevolent types in an apparently worthless stock) is enthralling enough but, as usual with the reliable Maling, human interest carries the load. (Is it homage or coincidence that Maling's police detectives have the same last names as other writers' series cops?)

*** William F. Buckley, Jr.: *Stained Glass,* Doubleday, $8.95. Buckley's second novel sends CIA agent Blackford Oakes to post-World War II Germany to get close to a candidate for Chancellor whose platform promises a reunified nation, a prospect neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R. want to encourage in the early fifties. The book is not fast-moving, and the elegant style militates against tension to a degree, but the final pages, as the moral dilemma of Oakes nears its resolution, create real suspense. Though the story clearly reflects his political viewpoint, Buckley does not subordinate the novel to the message.

*** Dick Francis: *Risk,* Harper and Row, $8.95. Accountant-steeplechase rider Roland Britten is kidnaped shortly after scoring a surprise win in the Cheltenham Gold Cup. Francis puts his hero through the usual skillfully described agonies on the way to uncovering an elaborate criminal plot. This is surely in the bottom third among the author's sixteen novels, but that will win most races.

*** Pat Flower: *Cobweb,* Stein and Day, $7.95. This Australian novel of a wife-murderer, though unrelentingly grim and downbeat, should, through the skill of the writing and characterization, keep you reading to the satisfying, if not completely surprising, denouement. (Several of Flower's novels are included in the publisher's series of "Jubilee Mysteries," which also includes titles by Josephine Bell, Laurence Meynell, Karen Campbell, and Diana Winsor, all new to American readers.)

*** Elizabeth Peters: *Street of the Five Moons,* Dodd Mead, $7.95. As usual, Peters offers more action and humor than most romantic suspense writers. How many gothics offer a heroine-on-hero line like the following? "I had to admire his well-developed sense

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of self-preservation, which was uncluttered by any taint of old-fashioned chivalry." The scene is Italy, and the plot concerns art fraud. The jacket artist notwithstanding, heroine Vicky Bliss looks nothing like Jane Fonda. Trust me.

*** Aaron Marc Stein: *Chill Factor,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $7.95. Matt Erridge, seeking only some skiing, becomes involved in a snowbound house-party novel not quite like any other. Though the culprit is fairly obvious most of the way, Stein's story-telling is as sure as ever. Friendship butting heads with suspicion is a familiar theme of the author's fiction.

*** Jon Cleary: *Vortex,* Morrow, $8.95. Murder and the threat of a tornado hover over a small Missouri town in this expertly crafted whodunit. The dialogue reveals such a good ear for American speech, it's tough to realize it was written by the Australian author of *The Sundowners.*

** Mark Denning: *Beyond the Prize,* HBJ/Jove, $1.25. Smooth, readable, unoriginal spy thriller with a multi-twist ending that is almost a parody of the genre. Though it's good to know you can still get a paperback novel for $1.25, another fifty cents' worth of research might have told the author that no Irishman would estimate someone's weight in pounds rather than stones.

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

DEATH AND THE MAIDEN, by James K. MacDougall. Bobbs-Merrill Co., $8.95.

The New York Times described MacDougall's first novel, *Weasel Hunt,* as "a fine example of the traditional private-eye mystery." In this second novel, again featuring David Stuart, Stuart is asked by an old college buddy to serve as go-between in the kidnaping of a five-year-old girl. He muffs the "meet" and gets thrown off the case by the girl's irate father. Guilt-ridden, Stuart continues on his own. He is helped by a sympathetic police sergeant, hindered by a corrupt sheriff. He finally turns to his old buddy for help, and they learn the sickening truth in a triple-play conclusion.

THE PLASTIC NIGHTMARE, by Richard Neely. Dale Books, $1.75.

Rescued from death after a harrowing car accident, Dan Marriott's broken face and body are repaired—but his memory is gone. What really happened on the night of the crash? His devoted wife and loving mistress both insist that they are telling him the truth about that night. But slowly, through his battered mind, comes the realization that someone is lying to him, that someone is trying to kill him. Suspense builds to an almost unbearable tension as Marriott tries to uncover the truth before the killer strikes again. A thrilling novel by the author of *While Love Lay Sleeping.*

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AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DIS-COUNTED PRICE
Aird, Catherine	PARTING BREATH	Doubleday (Crime Club)	$7.95	$6.35
Allan, Stella	AN INSIDE JOB	Scribners	7.95	6.35
Buckley, William F., Jr.	STAINED GLASS	Doubleday	8.95	6.95
Burns, Rex	SPEAK FOR THE DEAD	Harper & Row	8.95	6.95
Chesbro, George C.	CITY OF WHISPERING STONE	Simon & Schuster	8.95	6.95
Cleary, Jon	VORTEX	Morrow	8.95	6.95
Connolly, Ray	NEWSDEATH	Atheneum	8.95	6.95
Finlay, Iain	THE AZANIA ASSIGNMENT	Harper & Row	9.95	7.95
Flower, Pat	COBWEB	Stein & Day	7.95	6.35
Francis, Dick	RISK	Harper & Row	8.95	6.95
Grant, Charles L.	THE SOUND OF MIDNIGHT	Doubleday	7.95	6.35
Edited by Hardinge, George	WINTER'S CRIMES 9	St. Martin's	8.95	6.95
Edited by Hoch, Edward D.	BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR 1978	Dutton	8.95	6.95
Kenyon, Michael	THE MOLEHILL FILE	Coward, McCann & Geoghegan	7.95	6.35
MacDougall, James K.	DEATH AND THE MAIDEN	Bobbs-Merrill	8.95	6.95
Maling, Arthur	LUCKY DEVIL	Harper & Row	8.95	6.95
Pape, Gordon & Aspler, Tony	CHAIN REACTION	Viking	9.95	7.95
Peters, Elizabeth	STREET OF THE FIVE MOONS	Dodd, Mead	7.95	6.35
Scott, Jack S.	THE SHALLOW GRAVE	Harper & Row	7.95	6.35
Stein, Aaron Marc	CHILL FACTOR	Doubleday (Crime Club)	7.95	6.35
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Wilson, Jacqueline	MAKING HATE	St. Martin's	7.95	6.35

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BOUCHERCON 9
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October 6-7-8, 1978
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For registration and information write:
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IN MEMORIAM

AVE ATQUE VALE

by EDMUND CRISPIN

REX TODHUNTER STOUT (1886-1975)

Rex went to Paradise:
That was only fair.
Puffing Gilbert met him first,
And led him up the stair.
Allingham and Sayers,
Wilkie and Sir Arthur,
Stood with Edgar at the top,
Creators of the slayers:
While those who prowl to seek them out,
Philip, Perry, Peter,
Poirot and the others bowed
To welcome Stout.

Took him to a brownstone house.
Archie let them in;
Nero surged out of his chair,
Huge and wise as sin;
Set him on the yellow chair,
Rang the bell for beer,
Sent out to the Precinct
For Cramer to be here.
Fritz smiled at Lily Rowan,
Lily smiled at him;
Theo Horstmann scratched his head,
Saul looked grim.

For Nero Wolfe was speaking now:
"Here is not for you,
Scholar, sailor, banker, gardener—
Go somewhere new."
So they showed him a wooded height,
And there he built a home

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Twin to one in Tunis—
    There he turned the loam
For strawberries and irises;
    And there he lives for aye,
Where simple flowers, not orchids,
    Fling their perfume to the sky.

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JOHN DICKSON CARR (1906-1977)

Dead men tell this tale:
    How a dead man came among them,
    Slight and mustached and pale.

*Quia impossibile**
Perhaps for others, not for me.
    He smiled, being in no way vain,
And shook the hands of friends again.

"Those bolted doors, locked windows, strips of tape—
    And no one in the room to kill or rape:
Let's try him, see if *he's* Houdini's heir,"
    Said Rex—and took him to a cellar where
They mewed him, chained him, all in pitchy dark.

Yet soon a shout:
    "He's done it once again!
He's out!
    He's out!"

Dead men tell this tale:
    How a dead man came among them,
How, gamesome, Rex tried him with bolt and bar,
    How Heaven, friend-crammed, welcomed Dickson Carr.

*(I believe) "Because it is impossible." (Tertullian, *c.* 160-230)

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a *NEW* Virgil Tibbs story by

JOHN BALL

Here is the third short story about Virgil Tibbs, the famous black detective of "In the Heat of the Night." In this case Virgil Tibbs is a kind of professional onlooker, an innocent bystander lending a helpful hand; but it is Virgil Tibbs from the sidelines who provides the crucial clue . . . A hint to the reader: it is unlikely that this story could have been written, say, twenty years ago . . .

VIRGIL TIBBS AND THE FALLEN BODY

by JOHN BALL

The first thing Officer Frank Mitchell heard was a violent thud directly behind him; it was so powerful it seemed for a second that the very ground had shaken under his feet. He turned quickly, saw the body scarcely 30 feet away, and had a sudden, compelling desire to be sick. Only seven months out of the academy, he was still not used to the sight of sudden and violent death.

The body of the suicide, if that's what it was, had landed so hard the skull had split and what was revealed took all of Officer Mitchell's courage to face. Partly by reflex action he looked up, far up the side of the towering building in front of which he was standing. He saw an immensity of structure and glass that was totally unmoved by what had just happened. On Mitchell's first inspection the building gave no clue to the point from which the now smashed body had been launched into the air.

When he had seen and noted that, Officer Mitchell turned to do his unwelcome but necessary duty. There were a few others who had witnessed the terrible death; they hung back in a kind of

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hypnotized horror, unwilling either to come closer or to go away. Then through the small ring of spectators a slender but well-built black man came running forward, peeling off his coat at the same time. Because the man was headed straight toward the body on the sidewalk, Officer Mitchell held up his hands to stop him.

He could have saved himself the trouble; he was ignored. Instead, the intruder dropped to one knee and threw his coat over the head and shoulders of the fallen man. Then he looked up at Mitchell. "Tibbs," the man said. "Pasadena Police. Get some backup and an ambulance."

Mitchell came out of his near shock and responded by taking his small portable police radio out of its belt carrier. He raised it to his face and put out an urgent call. His immediate duty done, he walked the few steps to where the now covered body lay grimly still on the concrete. "Thank you," he said. "It got to me for a moment."

"Of course." The Pasadena policeman got to his feet and had his own look at the sheer face of the massive building. "He probably came from halfway up, or more. Did you note the condition of the skull?"

Mitchell swallowed and nodded. "Frank Mitchell," he introduced himself.

"Virgil Tibbs."

"What do you work?"

"Robbery homicide."

"Look, if you'd care to stick around until my backup—"

"Of course. This isn't my jurisdiction, but I'll do what I can." He took out his Pasadena ID and clipped it to his shirt pocket.

Mercifully, the gathering crowd showed no signs of wanting to come closer. A single young man armed with a small pocket camera started to move in, but retreated when Mitchell waved him away. After that the scene was static until a black and white patrol car coming Code Two pulled up with its roof lights still on. A sergeant got out; he was closing the car door when a second unit rolled in.

The sergeant took in the situation with a single careful look, then he too scanned the vast side of the huge building. He raised a hand to wave Virgil Tibbs away, then he saw the plastic identification clipped to his pocket. He came close enough to read it before he spoke. "You covered the body." It was a statement.

"Yes."

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"Thank you. The ambulance will be here right away."

As he spoke, a red paramedic unit from the fire department rolled up. The two-man crew had already been notified what to expect; one man riding on the passenger side had a blanket ready on his lap. He jumped out, walked quickly to the body, took off Tibbs's coat, and satisfied himself that life was extinct. Then he snapped the blanket open and dropped it over the corpse. After that he picked up the coat once more and returned it to its owner. "It may be stained," he warned.

Tibbs checked it carefully, then put it back on. "It's all right," he said. "I'll have it cleaned."

Mitchell was talking to his sergeant, reporting on what he had seen. It took him only a few moments, then he introduced Tibbs.

The Los Angeles sergeant was obviously experienced, but unpretentious. "I'm glad you were here to give us a hand," he said. "Bob Opper."

"Anything else I can do?"

"If you've got the time, I'd like to get your account of this."

"Whatever you want."

"You work homicide?"

"Yes."

"It looks like a jumper, of course, but I want to check it out. You're welcome if you want to come along."

That didn't call for an answer; as the sergeant turned toward the entrance of the very high building, Tibbs fell in beside him. "Did you get a look at the body before it was covered with the blanket?" Virgil asked.

"Partially. Why, did you catch something?"

"Perhaps," Tibbs replied.

They walked together into the huge lobby. By that time there were blue uniforms everywhere; the L.A.P.D. was definitely efficient. Behind them a coroner's unit arrived and two men got out. It was hardly ten minutes since the body had hit the sidewalk, but the official machinery to clean up was already functioning smoothly.

There was a uniformed guard in the lobby; at the sergeant's instruction he rang for the building manager.

That done, Opper turned to his black colleague from Pasadena. "You said you caught something."

"The deceased had on a brand-new pair of shoes. The soles were hardly scratched."

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"And you figure that a man wouldn't go and buy himself a new pair of shoes just before he killed himself."

"That's right. Buying a pair of shoes takes selection and fitting: if he was planning to take his life within the next hour, that wouldn't be a logical thing for him to do. From the condition of the soles he couldn't have walked more than two or three blocks at the most."

"He could have put on a new pair of shoes and then driven here."

"Agreed, but the percentages are against it; again, it wouldn't be logical unless his decision to kill himself was very sudden."

A patrolman came in with a wallet in his hands. "Here's the ID of the deceased," he said. "Robert T. Williamson, DOB 13 June 1932. His home address is in Orange County."

"Run him—see if he was in any trouble or had a rap sheet."

"Yes, sir." The patrolman reached for his radio.

A man was hurrying up to them. He was middle-aged and well dressed in an expensive business suit. His shoes were shined and his tie was a model of good taste. He turned his attention at once to the sergeant. "Excuse me, I've been on the phone," he said. My name is Phillips, I'm the general manager of this building. Tell me how I can help you."

"You know what happened?" Opper asked.

"Yes, unfortunately. I presume it had to come at some time, but this is the first such—tragedy—we've ever had."

As the two men were talking, Virgil Tibbs stepped over to the building directory and looked over the posted entries. When he came back, he had a question of his own. "Mr. Phillips, I notice that only the first thirty-two floors of the building appear to be occupied. Can you tell us about that?"

Phillips noted the police ID now clipped on the outside of Tibbs's coat, then responded. "Yes, that's true, although we don't advertise that fact. You see, the higher floors, while very desirable from a tenant's point of view, haven't been finished yet. Frankly, we found that rentals were way below our expectations while the building was going up, so the builders decided to hold off on the expense of completing the upper floors until there was a demand for the space. In that way, they could be finished to suit the wishes of the tenants who lease them."

"The whole building is air-conditioned," Tibbs said.

"Yes, of course. There's a great deal of glass, you see."

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"My point is, Mr. Phillips, do the windows open or are they all sealed shut?"

Opper looked at Tibbs and clearly approved the question.

"Most of the windows are sealed shut. A few do open, because the tenants wanted them that way."

"On a building this high, isn't that dangerous?" the sergeant asked.

"Yes, so we designed them as casement types and set the handles so that they will only open a little way."

"Could a determined man squeeze his body out of the opening?" the sergeant continued.

Phillips hesitated. "That would depend, of course, on the man. Offhand, I would say that it would be very difficult."

"Do you have a list of the personnel who work in this building?"

"No, you'd have to get that from the individual tenants."

"Do you know a Robert Williamson? About forty-five, medium build?"

"No, not as far as I know."

Virgil took over. "Mr. Phillips, suppose someone wanted to get onto one of the higher floors, even though they're unfinished. Could he do that easily?"

Phillips was prompt and emphatic with his answer. "I don't think he could do it at all. Since there are no tenants, the stairwells are blocked off above the thirty-second floor. The elevators are all in, but only one of them will go above the thirty-second floor, and it takes a key to operate it."

"You have the key, of course."

"Yes. Do you want to go up there?"

"First, can you tell us offhand whether or not any of the windows on the north face of the building above the occupied floors can be opened?"

"I'm almost certain they are all sealed. I can have it checked."

"How about the roof?"

"The maintenance people go up there regularly, and our resident building inspector. He works for us; his job is to keep a continual check on the building structure and all its systems. A building of this size—"

"I understand," Tibbs cut him off. "Now, sir, if you please, we'd like to see the roof."

At that point the patrolman who had been checking on the dead man reappeared; Sergeant Opper stepped aside to hear his report.

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As he did so, he motioned Tibbs to join him.

"No wants or warrants," the patrolman said. "Several traffic violations—nothing heavy. I also checked with Orange County sheriffs and they gave me a little more."

"Good work," Opper said.

"Williamson was apparently wealthy, but the source of his funds isn't known. He was hospitalized about a year ago; he fell down and cracked some ribs. In the course of treating him, they found some evidence of illegal narcotics use."

"How did they get hold of information like that?" Tibbs asked. "That's privileged."

"I know, sir, but they still knew about it, don't ask me how. Apparently he wasn't hooked or anything like that, but he had some kind of medical history of narcotics. No action was taken at the time."

"Probably the patient gave permission to have his chart seen," Opper said, "without realizing that the narcotics data was on there. Anyhow, it explains a lot. He could have dropped acid some time back when it was still popular. Then, without warning, he went off on another trip—you know it works that way. Somehow he got to the roof and, like a lot of others, thought he could fly."

"Let's go up to the roof," Tibbs suggested.

On top of the building the height was terrifying anywhere near to the edge. The rooftop itself had many pieces of equipment installed—huge air ducts, antennae, and housings for elevator machinery. A sharp wind reminded all three men how high they were.

When Tibbs looked up, the movement of the clouds overhead gave the illusion that the building was leaning. After he recovered himself, he walked carefully across the cement to the comparatively low parapet, judged the wind once again, and then began a meticulous examination of a section of the protective wall. He spent so much time doing it that his L.A.P.D. colleague began to show impatience. "Find anything?" he asked.

Tibbs looked back at him. "No," he answered, "and I'm strongly reminded of the dog in the nighttime."

"The dog did nothing in the nighttime," the sergeant responded promptly.

"You have just increased my admiration of the L.A.P.D.," Tibbs said. "You know your Sherlock Holmes. If you're through, let's go back down. This place is a little awesome."

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When they were back on the ground floor, Tibbs noticed a coffee shop set in one corner. After thanking Phillips for the trip to the roof, and the rest of his cooperation, Tibbs suggested that the L.A.P.D. sergeant join him for a cup of coffee. Sergeant Opper, who understood completely, accepted and saw to it that they were seated in a secluded booth.

"Now, what have you got?" he asked after their order had been taken.

"You've got one of two things—accident or homicide. At the moment I like homicide better."

Opper was careful. "From the condition of the body, the victim came off the roof, because he wouldn't have landed that hard from a lower floor. At least I don't think so; I'm no expert on jumpers."

"He didn't jump," Tibbs said. "The PM may show a percentage of drugs in his body, and a careful check should be made for past acid use—that's the most likely thing if it was an accident. But this may help you a little—he definitely *didn't* come off the roof."

Opper was thoughtful. "If Phillips is right, none of the windows on the unoccupied floors open. We haven't checked yet for a broken pane."

"In a way we have. If Williamson had broken a window in order to jump, there'd be some glass on the sidewalk. Your man out there might have been hurt, or some innocent pedestrians. No, I'm sure he didn't break a window."

"How certain are you that he didn't come off the roof?"

"You felt the wind up there. Despite it there was some dust on the roof. It wasn't disturbed where he would have had to have gone over. And the parapet was unmarked."

"Plus which, of course, just anybody couldn't get up onto the roof without a key to the special elevator. And Phillips, the building manager, had never heard of the dead man."

"Which leaves only one possibility," Tibbs said. He stopped then and waited while the coffee was served.

"He couldn't have fallen out of the sky," Opper mused. "You can't get out of modern aircraft the way that—what was his name?—did. Over the English Channel, wasn't it?"

"Helicopter," Tibbs said, and stirred his coffee.

"Someone would have seen it."

"Twenty years ago, yes, but not now. Police and media helicopters fly over the city at low altitude all the time and they're commonplace. The fire department has some too. The point is, no

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one notices them or hears them any more, except under unusual circumstances. They don't look up just to see them fly by."

Sergeant Opper drank some coffee while he thought. "All right, he could have come out of a helicopter; and come to think of it, some of them don't even have doors, or the doors are very easily opened."

"True."

"But the pilot would have reported it."

Tibbs smiled, not very much, and it was a little grim.

"All the helicopters operating in the greater Los Angeles area have a special frequency for talking to each other: it's one two two point nine five. If it had been an accident, then the pilot would have gone on the air immediately, knowing that all the law-enforcement helicopters airborne in the area would hear him. But he didn't. That's why I think it was a homicide."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. Helicopters can fly at almost any speed they like, up to their maximum. They can turn on a dime, hover, and do lots of other things."

"Therefore?"

"Therefore I think that Williamson was dumped out of a helicopter just at the point where it would appear he had jumped from the building. Remember, a good helicopter pilot can maneuver his machine with great precision, even in a wind."

"One objection, Tibbs, and it's a strong one. Williamson would have struggled. He would have grabbed onto something. He was a well set up man and the pilot had to keep flying. Unless there were other people in the chopper. Even then, throwing a man out against his will would take a lot of doing. I wouldn't care to try it."

Tibbs nodded. "Let me put together a theory—you can check it easily enough. The man had traces of narcotics use, but he wasn't hooked. That suggests someone who handled the stuff, but who was too smart to use it himself. That's supported by his evident wealth with no obvious source for the money—you can check that too. If I'm right so far, then we're talking about some very ruthless people who are engaged in one of the most profitable forms of crime known."

Opper took out his inevitable notebook. "I'll check with our narcotics people. If they knew Williamson, or of him, you've got something."

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"Do you want the rest?"

"By all means."

"I don't think the fall killed him. Or if it did, he was unconscious when he was tossed from the chopper. Suppose he was given a shot and taken out. Then he was dumped from the chopper so that he would appear to have jumped from the building. No one saw the helicopter for the reasons already given."

"Father Brown's postman."

"Exactly. Getting rid of an unconscious man, or a dead one, could be done without too much trouble. The cause of death would be so obvious that extensive tests probably wouldn't be run."

"Not everybody has a helicopter," Opper said.

"And that's the point where your investigation should begin. If you'll allow me."

Opper got up. "I'll call you tomorrow," he promised.

MR TIBBS:

WHILE YOU WERE OUT SGT OPPER OF LAPD CALLED YOU. HE SAID CORONER DETERMINED CAUSE OF DEATH OD HEROIN, NOT FALL (???) CHECK WITH SHERIFF'S ARGUS PATROL AND FIRE DEPARTMENT CONFIRMS NO MESSAGE RECEIVED ON 122.95 AT TIME OF INCIDENT. HE SAYS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL CHOPPER ID'ED. CASE DEFINITELY HOMICIDE, MANY THANKS YOUR COOPERATION, LETTER COMING TO CHIEF MCGOWAN RE YOUR HELP. HE ALSO SAID NARCO HAD FOLDER ON WILLIAMSON.

MARGE

Hey, Virg, what the hell happened, anyway?

M.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Once again we give you a second story by an author whose first story did not appear in EQMM. We have never read Nan Hamilton's first story, but we are impressed with her second. For one thing, it introduces an uncommon, perhaps a rare type of detective—a young Japanese-American who is "a by-product of his background. He had come out of high school with the typical American imprint—a good athlete and as fond of hamburgers and hot dogs as of sukiyaki." But, as you will see, it is Lieutenant Ohara's Japanese heritage that he draws on to solve a murder case that "was like a tale out of old Japan. It seemed almost impossible that it could have happened on a quiet residential street in California" . . .

TOO MANY PEBBLES

by NAN HAMILTON

Lieutenant Sam Ohara, Robbery-Homicide, sat at his desk brooding over the photographs of Ricky Zalba, deceased, sprawled on his back like a discarded ragdoll. Police flashbulbs had preserved every grisly detail in sharpest outline, but the photographs added little to what the Lieutenant had observed on the scene at six o'clock that morning. The body lay, arms outflung, half on a driveway and half on the damp earth of a vacant lot. A blood-tipped switchblade was frozen into the right hand, while the left hand seemed to claw for life in agonized desperation.

The lab reports contributed what he had already surmised. Zalba's skull had been fractured, his larynx and chest crushed. It was almost as if he had been run over by a car. But there were no abrasions, his expensive sports coat was not torn, and there were no tire marks. The only unusual marks near the body were two deep parallel indentations in the earth.

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Lieutenant Ohara studied the pictures again and noted the measurements. The upper indentation was five inches long by one and one-quarter inches wide, the lower one was four and three-quarter inches long by one and one-half inches wide. They had been driven into the ground to a depth of almost two inches.

The remaining information was sparse. The body had been discovered by a milkman at 5:30 A.M. A canvass of the neighborhood shortly afterward had turned up no witnesses. The final notation on the lab report was a little more helpful. They had discovered a derivative of sesame oil on the victim's left hand, and shattered glass and metal fragments under the victim's heel, that might have been the remains of a woman's watch.

Half-heard voices in the hallway broke his concentration and Ohara sat back in resigned exasperation as he caught the words.

"This where I'll find Lieutenant O'Hara?" Evidently Reagan, the desk sergeant, was breaking in a new recruit. Bob Wiseman from Vice, next door, was helping things along.

"The Irishman, O'Hara? He's in there."

Seconds later a sandy-haired patrol officer glanced past the Lieutenant and around the otherwise empty room. Ohara looked up.

"Yes?"

"I'm looking for Lieutenant O'Hara. Sergeant Reagan asked me to drop off this file."

"I'm Ohara." The Lieutenant stood up, an impressive six feet tall with football shoulders.

"But you're a Jap—" Ohara's smooth ivory face was very still and his black eyes were hard. "I mean"—the young officer stammered his confusion—"you're not Irish, sir . . . are you?"

Ohara's eyes relented. "Nope. Ohara is a good old Japanese name. We just don't use the Irish apostrophe."

The patrolman looked miserable. "I'm sorry, sir."

"Don't be. Reagan likes to have his fun." Ohara took the manila folder and put it on his desk. The officer, still flushed with embarrassment was almost out the door when Ohara remarked, "*Arigato gozaimashita,*" and then erased the patrolman's startled expression when he added, "Just 'thank you,' in Japanese."

The little scene played out, Ohara sat down recalling how he had bristled the first time the boys had pulled it on him. As a third-generation Japanese-American, he was still sensitive to slurs. But he had come to realize the rough camaraderie in it and

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now went along good-naturedly with the department joke.

He recognized, too, that his sensitivity was a by-product of his background. He had come out of high school with the typical American imprint—a good athlete and as fond of hamburgers and hot dogs as of sukiyaki. He was too young to remember the internment camp during World War II, but he'd heard his parents and grandparents talk about it.

He spoke better Japanese than most Japanese-Americans simply because his family had always used both languages interchangeably.

Ohara had learned early in life that when you are one of the so-called "quiet" minorities, your only chance is to be better than good, or else take what's left. So after his service in Vietnam he'd used his GI bill for a Masters in Police Science and had eventually joined the L.A. Police Department.

He picked up the photos again and stared at the puzzling indentations. The answer was there, he was sure, but he couldn't grasp it. He considered the victim. Zalba's four-page rap sheet for assault and narcotics violations offered possibilities. But it wasn't that kind of killing, not that straightforward. Absently Ohara looked at his watch. He was off duty and should be leaving, since he'd promised his wife, Peggy, that he would be home in time for an early supper. Their son, Jim, was in his first football game and wanted his parents there.

Gathering the pictures and reports, Ohara put them into his desk, wondering how he was going to tell Peggy that he could not go to her grandfather's birthday celebration tomorrow. She would be very disappointed. He hated to miss it himself, since Grandfather Takahashi, Black Belt Aikido Master, had been his teacher in that powerful martial art. In fact, it had been in Takahashi's Aikido class that Ohara had (literally) fallen for his wife, Peggy.

As he got into his car in the parking lot, he decided to stop in and see his old teacher, though nowadays he thought of him as *Ojiisan* (grandfather). It wasn't too far to the small house in Crenshaw and before long he pulled up in front of the neatly fenced yard and went through the gate, taking the pebbled path around the house to the back. Ohara knew *Ojiisan* would probably be enjoying his quiet Japanese garden at this time of day. And he was, looking like a picture of old Japan in his favorite dark kimono, which seemed so right with his ascetic face and erect bearing.

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Ojiisan greeted his favorite pupil with a welcoming smile. They exchanged the polite inquiries of civilized conversation and turned to admire the master's prize collection of bonsei trees. Ohara marveled that although the old man would be 75 tomorrow, he looked a vigorous 50. He always enjoyed his company but today, despite the peace of the small garden, Ohara could not control his restlessness. His mind kept probing his puzzling new case. He must have let his accumulated tension show for *Ojiisan* drew him finally over to the rock-bordered fishpond.

"Isamu"—the old man laid a gentle hand on his arm—"do you see how clear the pool is?"

Ohara looked down at the golden *koi*, flashing like bright jewels beneath the water. "Yes, *Ojiisan*, it is beautiful."

Stooping quickly the master picked up a handful of pebbles and dropped them one by one into the pool. The glassy surface was convulsed with rippling circles, that obscured the watery world beneath.

"You see, Isamu, the pool can no longer reflect a true image of what is there. It is like your mind. You, too, are restless and disturbed because you have dropped in too many pebbles. Come inside; we will have tea."

Ohara would have liked to protest that he could not stay for tea, but he could not find it in his heart to disappoint the old man. "Yes, *Ojiisan,* I should like that very much," he answered and followed his teacher into the house, pausing only to remove his shoes in the small hallway.

When he was led into the formal *tatami* room, Ohara knew that not only refreshment was intended, but the full treatment—the ritual tea ceremony. It was too late to back out now, so obediently he settled himself Japanese fashion on his knees. As he waited for *Ojiisan* to complete the prescribed preparations of the tea master, Ohara's eyes passed over the exquisite simplicity of the room which was used only for the *cha no yu* ceremony.

The beautiful simple utensils lay waiting on a small lacquer tray, to be handled with respect and love in the time-honored graceful movements. He admired the chrysanthemums in the *tokonomo* alcove, their flowery heads arranged to honor heaven, man, and earth. His gaze was drawn to the old Japanese print that adorned a side wall. Its glowing colors of blue and amber depicted two sturdy and bulging-calved bearers carrying a lady over a moon-arched bridge.

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He had long ago been trained by *Ojiisan* in the proper responses of the tea guest, so he carried off his part in the ceremony adequately. As he turned the brown glazed tea bowl the required three times and suitably admired its rich luster, he wondered briefly what the boys in the department would think of "the Irishman" if they could see him now.

When it was over, Ohara found that the small perfection of time had calmed him and cleared his mind. As he put on his shoes and bowed a last *sayonara*, he felt new confidence that he would find the answers he needed.

That evening, still amazingly relaxed, he enjoyed the football game and was proud of young Jim. Peggy had taken his announcement that he would have to work tomorrow quite well. She had by now accepted the realities of being a policeman's wife. After the game they had indulged in a pizza and beer, and gone home.

Peggy was warm and loving, and as he drifted toward sleep, his arms holding her tightly, he thought drowsily that he had truly emptied his mind. The pool was clear. The therapists, he reflected, should give the Japanese tea ceremony careful consideration. He saw again *Ojiisan's* calm, measured movements, the quiet peace of the little *tatami* room, the bowing grace of the chrysanthemums, the rich glow of the old print . . . Suddenly he was sitting upright in bed.

"That's it! It could be nothing else."

Peggy, halfway between rude awakening and growing concern, touched his shoulder in alarm.

"What is it, Sam? What's wrong?"

"Not what's wrong—it's what's exactly right. Never mind, dear, go back to sleep. I'll explain later."

Knowing him well, Peggy snuggled down again. Sam was all right, she knew, the rest didn't matter. But Ohara lay awake mentally fitting new pieces into the jigsaw puzzle of his case.

The next morning he called into the department and asked his partner. Jake Woszinski, to recheck the residents of the neighborhood where Zalba's body had been found. He wanted to know about anything unusual they might have seen or heard as much as a week before the murder.

After a fortifying breakfast of ham and eggs, he went down to Little Tokyo and visited the largest of the Japanese department stores. The answers he found there seemed to please him. Next he

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stopped at the office of the Japanese-language newspaper, *Rafu Shimpo*, and talked with the editor.

Here he obtained a back copy of the issue he wanted. He had a quick bowl of noodles in a small café, then headed for Pacoima and the scene of Zalba's killing. He knew now how it had been done, but he still didn't know why. Instinct told him that the why of it was most important. Deliberately he turned his mind off, concentrating on his driving. As he turned the corner, a block away from where the body had been found, he suddenly stamped on the brakes and pulled his car to the curb.

He had almost forgotten the convalescent hospital that looked more like a ranch house than an institution. Jake had checked it, he was sure, but the question that had just occurred to him was a brand-new piece of the puzzle.

After the usual protocol he found himself in the office of the nursing supervisor, a Miss MacPherson, who did not appreciate the intrusion of murder into her well-ordered domain.

When he had asked his question, she fairly bristled in defense of her staff.

"Our people are carefully screened, Lieutenant Oh—Ohara," she stumbled momentarily over the name and looked down at his card for reassurance.

"I'm sure they are, Miss MacPherson. I merely want to talk to anyone who came on or went off duty, or left the hospital between eleven and midnight on that night."

"Well, you're out of luck then. Our staff shifts at three thirty, ten, and six in the morning."

Ohara's heart sank for the times were wrong. He stood up and his good-looking face relaxed into a smile. "Thank you anyway, Miss MacPherson. I'm sorry to have taken up your time. But sometimes even negative information can be of help."

Discouraged, he walked down the long corridor to the exit and was just going out the door when he heard his name called, and turned to see Miss MacPherson hurrying after him.

"Oh, Lieutenant Ohara, I just remembered. We have two special nurses who have been coming on for the past three weeks. One of them, Ellen Murakami, comes on at midnight. I wrote down her address."

She handed him a slip of paper with a self-conscious smile brightening her angular features.

Ohara, grateful, sensed what would please her. "*Arigato*

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gozaimashita, Okusan," he said, then bowed low and went out the door. Miss MacPherson stood looking after him, her hand touching her cheek which was pleasantly flushed. "So like James Shigeta in *Flower Drum Song,"* she sighed to herself, and walked dreamily back to her office.

Ohara glanced at his watch—almost four o'clock. Ellen Murakami's address was close by, and she would be at home now if she went on duty at twelve. He decided to check first with Jake and find out if anything new had turned up. He stopped at a pay phone to make his call.

Jake's jovial response told Ohara that his partner was pleased with the results of his work.

"How did you know I'd get a hit?" Jake asked.

"I looked in a fortune cookie. What is it?"

"A Miss Parker, who suffers from insomnia, says she has been hearing clicking sounds around midnight for the past two weeks. She thought it might be kids scraping her picket fence and looked out the window. But there was nothing to call the cops about, just a big fat guy going by in baggy clothes, a cap, and sandals."

Ohara felt a surge of elation. "Thanks, Jake. That's a help."

"Well, you'll need another fortune cookie. She didn't hear it on the night of the murder. That everything?"

"What's her address, I think I'll drop in and see her. I need to kill a few minutes before I talk to another possible witness. Was there anything new on the oil on Zalba's hand?"

"Yeah, the lab says it's a special kind of hair dressing. They haven't run across it before." Then Jake gave him Miss Parker's address and hung up.

Ohara found the woman's house a block down and knocked at the door. The sleepless lady volubly informed him that of course she didn't hear or see anything on the night of the murder because she had gone to her sister's to play bingo, and had stayed overnight.

As soon as he could, Ohara disengaged himself and a few minutes later was standing in front of Ellen Murakami's door waiting for someone to answer the bell.

A frail gramdmother type opened the door and after showing his credentials, Ohara asked to speak to Miss Ellen Murakami.

"No, Engrishu," the old lady muttered, looking scared. She began to shut the door, and he repeated his question in polite Japanese. At this she looked even more frightened, but she

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opened the door and reluctantly motioned him to come into the living room.

With a hurried bow she said she would find Murakami-san, and darted out of the room. Ohara heard muttering in the background, but could distinguish no words. One of the voices he was sure had been a man's. Moments later a girl came through the old-fashioned archway that led into the small living room.

Ohara stood up as she came toward him, studying her pale face, so like a Utamaro painting, under a lustrous sweep of black hair. She was dressed simply in a dark skirt and white blouse. The modest V of the neckline was filled in by a peach-colored scarf which was wrapped closely to her throat.

"I'm Ellen Murakami," she said softly. "You wanted to see me?"

Her hands tore nervously at a handkerchief as she seemed scarcely to breathe. Ohara sensed her fear, and felt a momentary pity, but his hunter's instincts were alerted. She was very much on guard. He smiled reassuringly. "Just a few questions. May we sit down?"

He led her through routine questions as to her hours, and what she might have seen or heard on the night in question. When she began to relax, Ohara asked suddenly, "What time is it, Miss Murakami? My watch has been running slow today and I do have another appointment."

She looked automatically at her wrist, whitened, and turned her head toward the clock on the mantel. "It is five o'clock, Lieutenant." The fear was back again and it showed in her voice.

At that moment the grandmother came in with two small cups of green tea. The girl smiled, relieved. "My *Obachan* thought you would like tea—" She paused, uncertain. Ohara murmured polite thanks as the old lady set down the tea tray and darted away.

"How long ago did you lose your watch, Miss Murakami?" Ohara asked as he picked up the fragrant cup of tea.

"I—I—don't know."

"I noticed that you looked first at your wrist, so it must have been fairly recently."

"Perhaps, I can't remember." Suddenly Ohara felt uneasy, sensing another presence, unseen, listening. In the silence the sibilant sound of breathing was barely audible.

As he drained the tiny teacup, Ohara deliberately let his notebook fall to the floor, along with his pen. Instinctively polite, Ellen Murakami dropped to her knees to retrieve it.

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Profuse with apologies, Ohara switched to Japanese and she answered him. His eyes never left her face and as she reached under the chair for the pen, he saw what he had expected to see. The peach-colored scarf, pulled slightly askew with the reach of her arm, showed a jagged red line against the ivory skin of her throat.

As Ohara accepted the pen and notebook from her hands with grave thanks, he said, still in Japanese for the benefit of the unseen listener, "I have found your watch, Miss Murakami. It was under the body of the man who was murdered two nights ago, not far from the hospital." He was stretching a point, he knew, since the smashed fragments in the lab were barely identifiable, but she could not find words to deny it. Her eyes, filled with terror and despair, were all the answer he needed.

He pressed his advantage. "I notice that you have been injured." He indicated her throat. "Did the man attack you? Was that how you lost your watch?"

He hated to bully her, but he knew it was necessary. With a sob she broke, but her words were unexpected. "Not murder—not murder—"

"Will you tell me about it, Ellen?"

"*Iie* . . ." she sobbed, shaking her head; the brief Japanese negative seemed her only defense.

Ohara raised his voice and made it threatening, doing what he had to do.

"Then I will have to bring you into the station for questioning, Miss. You are implicated in a murder." The staccato Japanese hammered the words home.

The small cruelty to the girl did the trick. Suddenly the archway was filled with the figure of a man—immense and powerful. His head, with a high formal topknot of hair glistening with oil, barely cleared the curve of the entrance. Ohara caught his breath as his eyes took in the huge bulk of him, straining the dark blue kimono that covered 300 pounds or more. The man's hands hung loosely, ready at his sides, and beneath the kimono his bare calves showed like young tree trunks.

Ohara's eyes slid down to the feet and lingered. As he had known they would be, ever since he had remembered *Ojiisan's* Japanese print of the litter bearers, the man's feet were thrust into a pair of Japanese *geta*. Heavy thongs between the toes held the sturdy wooden platforms secure on top of two parallel blocks

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which raised them a good two inches from the ground. The same blocks, Ohara knew, which had left the peculiar indentations in the earth beside Zalba's body.

The wooden *geta* clicked on the bare floor as the man moved to stand in front of Ellen.

The inherent menace in the huge figure made Ohara step back into the defensive Aikido stance, his body loose, his mind concentrated to anticipate the expected attack.

But there was no attack. Intead, strangely soft, yet guttural Japanese spewed out at him from the man's throat. At the sound another piece of evidence fell into place—the man spoke with the bruised vocal chords of a Sumo wrestler.

"*Taisho*, Officer. You will not take her. She has done nothing. It is I who have done this thing."

Before Ohara could answer, Ellen Murakami spoke in rapid English, her hands outstretched in appeal.

"Oh, no, please. It is not what you think. Jiro"—she placed her hand gently on the huge arm of the man beside her—"Jiro was trying to save me. That—that man grabbed me as I passed the driveway and held a knife to my throat." She pulled the scarf aside to show the ugly wound. "He said he was going to—he meant to—but Jiro had followed me." The glance she turned toward her silent protector was rich with love, then she continued. "Jiro pushed the man's hands away and told me me to run. But I didn't. Then—then—" She hesitated and the involuntary shift of her eyes told Ohara her next words would not be all truth. "You must believe me. It was an accident. Jiro fell against him—an accident—not murder."

Gently, but with a reproachful look, the giant moved Ellen aside.

"This is not woman's business. I will speak," he said in Japanese.

Ohara became suddenly formal. He bowed low. "I am glad, Onami-san."

"How do you know my name?"

In answer Ohara drew from his pocket a folded page from *Rafu Shimpo* with the story of the great Sumo wrestler, Onami, and his visit to California.

The famous wrestler grunted and asked in his soft, slurred voice.

"How did you find me? Did someone see?"

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Ohara, pocketing the newspaper clipping, shook his head and answered in the Japanese honorific style that befitted the man who stood before him.

"No one saw the struggle, Onami-san, but someone noticed you several times the week before passing by near the place where it happened."

The big man almost smiled. "I did not wear kimono, but I am too big to hide much. It was very dark. Do Americans not sleep at night?"

Ohara gestured toward Onami's feet. "The sound of your *geta* on the sidewalk woke someone who noticed you. Then, too, beside the dead body, I found the marks the *geta* made. When I knew what the marks were, I knew the man I was seeking was Japanese. No *gaijin* walks in *geta* on the street. When I saw how deep the marks were, I knew he must be a very heavy man."

"There are many such heavy men," Onami said impassively.

Ohara smiled. "True, Onami-san, but the oil on the victim's hand we found to be a kind of hair oil used only in Japan, only by Sumo wrestler." He allowed his eyes to glance at Onami's oiled topknot of hair.

"You are right, *Taisho*," Onami acknowledged, "but how did you come to this house?"

"The hospital told us Miss Murakami arrived about midnight that night. We found the remains of a woman's watch under the body. These two facts pointed here."

Onami moved suddenly and Ohara was on his guard again.

"*Taisho*, I have killed this animal, but I did not intend to kill him. Miyuki—" The wrestler turned to Ellen and gently wiped the tears from her cheek with one huge finger. "Miyuki is my friend's sister. I came from Japan to visit her. I have asked to marry her. I do not like that she goes to work at night, so I follow her. That night I saw the man and what he tried to do. I pulled Miyuki from his hands. Then with his knife he ran against me.

"I am Sumo. I know only one way to fight." The dignity of the simple statement said it all, but Onami continued, "So I charge him and he goes down. When I charge this way in the Sumo ring no one dies. I am thrown down myself sometimes, yet I am alive."

Ohara could visualize the bullet-like launch of that massive body, the shoulder thrusting into Zalba's scrawny throat until the momentum of Onami's 300 pounds bore him down, until his skull cracked like an egg on the concrete driveway.

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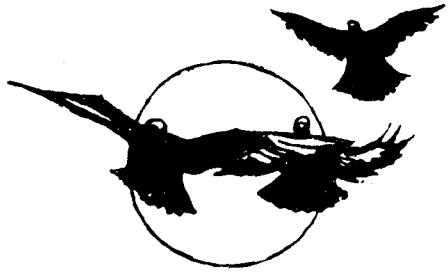
Onami looked down at Ellen reproachfully. "I have told her to run away, but she is not yet obedient. She did not go. She came and touched the man and said he was dead. She warned me we must not say anything or I would be sent away and we could not marry."

Ohara, American as he was, felt his ancestral Samurai blood stir. It was like a tale out of old Japan. It seemed almost impossible that it could have happened on a quiet residential street in California. He looked at Onami-san, whose name meant Great Wave, waiting quietly for him to pass sentence. He kept his feelings out of his voice and used the polite formal phrases of Japanese officialdom which he knew were expected.

"Onami-san, I believe you did not intend to kill this man. Miss Murakami's testimony and the other evidence will show this. There will be some formalities, but you will not be detained longer than necessary." He would not soon forget the look of pure joy on Ellen Murakami's face.

"Tomorrow you must come to the station and make a statement." Ohara almost smiled as he thought of the impact Onami would have on the department.

A short time and many bows later Ohara left the modest house where a modern-day Samurai stood protectively by his promised bride. As he drove away, his mind was undisturbed by the least ripple of doubt. Some day he would tell *Ojiisan* the story. Ohara felt he had a right to know.



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a *NEW* Mrs. Craggs story by

H. R. F. KEATING

We first met Mrs. Craggs, the charwoman criminologist, in H. R. F. Keating's story titled "The Five Senses of Mrs. Craggs," in the November 1973 issue of EQMM—nearly five years ago. Well, Mrs. Craggs is still "doing for" her—clients, customers, people? Here we meet her again in "Mrs. Craggs's Sixth Sense" and we can't help wondering: will our next meeting reveal Mrs. Craggs's "seventh sense"? An interesting and provocative prospect . . .

MRS. CRAGGS'S SIXTH SENSE

by *H. R. F. KEATING*

It was a good thing that Mrs. Craggs had had her twinges. If she had not, and had not acted on them, the nasty little something-or-other that had developed just under the skin on her right elbow could not have been dealt with so easily; and more important, poor old Professor Partheman would have been in much worse trouble than he was. But twinges she did have, and the doctor she went to recommended a minor operation. With the consequence that Mrs. Craggs "did for" Professor Partheman that particular week on Wednesday and not on Thursday.

And so she set eyes on Ralph.

He was doing no more than mow the lawn in front of the professor's ground-floor flat and from time to time taking a boxful of clippings round to the compost heap behind the shrubbery. But that was enough for Mrs. Craggs.

"Excuse me for mentioning it, sir," she said to the professor as she tucked her wages into her purse, "but I would just like to say a word about that chap."

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"What chap, Mrs. Craggs? I was not aware that we had discussed any chap."

The old professor was a bit spiky sometimes, but Mrs. Craggs liked working for him because, despite his great age, there he was always beavering away at his writing and papers, doing his job and no messing about. So she ignored the objection and went on with what she had to say.

"That feller what you've got in to mow your old bit of a lawn, sir."

"Ralph, Mrs. Craggs," said the professor. "A young man employed as domestic help over at Royal Galloway College and making a little extra on his day off. Now, what do you want to say about him?"

The professor glared, as if he already knew without realizing it that Mrs. Craggs had an adverse comment to make.

She took a good long breath.

"I don't think you ought to have him around, sir," she said. "I don't like the looks of him, and that's a fact."

"Mrs. Craggs," said the professor in the voice he had used to put down any number of uppish undergraduates, "that you do not 'like the looks' of Ralph may be a fact, but anything else you have said or implied about him most certainly is not. Now, do you know any facts to the young man's detriment?"

"Facts, I don't know, sir. But feelings I have. He'll do you no good and of that I'm certain sure."

"My dear good lady, are you really suggesting I should cease to offer the fellow employment just because of some mysterious feeling you have? What is it about his looks that you don't like, for heaven's sake?"

Mrs. Craggs thought. She had not up to that moment attempted to analyze her feeling. She had just had it. But overwhelmingly.

After a little she managed to pin something down.

"I think it's the way he prowls, sir," she said. "Whenever he goes anywhere he prowls. Like an animal, sir. Like a—"

She searched her mind.

"A jaguar, sir. He prowls like one o' them jaguars. That's it."

"My dear Mrs. Craggs. You cannot really be telling me that all you have against the chap is the way he walks. It's too ridiculous."

But Mrs. Craggs was not so easily discouraged. She thought about the young gardener at intervals right up to the following

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Monday when she was next due at the professor's. She even was thinking about him during the minor operation which had been such a striking success. And when on the Monday she had been given her money she broached the subject again.

"That Ralph, sir. I hope as 'ow you've had second thoughts there."

"Second thoughts." The aged professor's parchment-white face was suffused with pinkness. "Let me tell you, my dear lady, I had no need for more than the swiftest of first thoughts. I have spent a lifetime dealing in facts, Mrs. Craggs, hard facts, and I'm scarcely likely to abandon them now. Not one word more, if you please."

Mrs. Craggs sighed. "As you like, sir."

But, though she said no more then, she made up her mind to do all that she could to protect the old professor from the jaguar she had seen prowling across his lawn carefully avoiding ever appearing to look in at the windows of the flat.

And, she thought, she had one way of perhaps obtaining some "facts." It so happened at that time that her friend of long standing, Mrs. Milhorne, was employed as a daily cleaner at Royal Galloway College. At the first opportunity she paid her a visit at her home, though that was not unfortunately till the following Tuesday evening.

"Oh, yes, Ralph," said Mrs. Milhorne. "I always knew in my bones about him. Handsome he may have been, and sort of romantic, if you take my meaning, but I never tried to make up to 'im, no matter what they say."

"I'm sure you didn't, dear," said Mrs. Craggs, who knew her friend's susceptible nature. "But why do you go on about him as if he ain't there no more?"

"Because that's what he ain't," said Mrs. Milhorne.

And then the whole story came out. Ralph had been dismissed about a fortnight before, suspected of having brutally attacked a young Spanish maid at the college. The girl, Rosita by name, although battered about terribly and still actually off work, had refused to say who had caused her injuries. But, as Ralph had notoriously been attracted to her, no one really had had any doubt.

" 'Spect he's back home now, wherever that is," said Mrs. Milhorne, and she sighed.

"No, he's not," Mrs. Craggs said. "I told you, dear. He's coming

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every Wednesday to mow old Professor Partheman's lawn, and the professor's got picture frames full of old coins, gold an' all. He's what's called one o' them new miserists. An' if that Ralph's just half o' what I think he is, he'll be planning to help himself there, 'specially now he's out of a job."

A red flush of excitement came up on Mrs. Milhorne's pallid face.

"We'll have to go to the rescue," she said. "Just like on telly. The United States Cavalry."

"Yes," said Mrs. Craggs. "Only when old Professor Partheman sees you a-galloping up, an' me come to that, you know what he'll do? He'll tell us to turn right roun' and gallop away again. Or he will unless we come waving some facts on our little blue flags."

She stood considering.

"Rosita," she said at last. "She's got to be made to talk."

But since Rosita knew hardly a word of English and since she had obstinately persevered with her silence, Mrs. Craggs's plan seemed to run up against insuperable difficulties.

Only it was Mrs. Craggs's plan.

Introduced next morning to the room in which Rosita was resting, her face still blotched with heavy bruises, Mrs. Craggs first gave her a heart-warming smile and then joined her in a nice cuppa, selecting from a plate of biscuits the sweetest and stickiest and pressing them on the Spanish girl with such hearty insistence that if the interview was to do nothing else it would at least add some ounces to Rosita's already deliciously buxom figure. But Mrs. Craggs had only just begun.

" 'Ere," she said, when she judged the moment ripe. "You know I works for an old professor?"

Rosita would hardly have understood this abruptly proffered piece of information had not Mrs. Craggs at the same time jumped to her feet and first mimed to a T the old professor, frail as a branch of dried twigs, and then had imitated herself brushing and dusting and polishing fit to bust.

"*Si, si,*" said the Spanish girl, eyes alight and dancing. "Work, *si, si.* Ol' man, *si, si.*"

"Ah, you're right, dear," Mrs. Craggs said. "But I ain't the only one what works fer 'im."

Another bout of miming.

"*Ah, si. Si. Jardinero.*"

"Yes," said Mrs. Craggs. "A gardener. Ralph."

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And the vigor she put into saying the name sent at once a wave of pallor across the Spanish girl's plump and pretty face.

"*Ah, si,* Ralph."

"Yes, dear. You got it nicely. But listen. That old prof, he's got a lot o' valu'ble coins in his study. His study, see."

In place of Mrs. Craggs there came a picture of an ancient scholar bent over his books, scribbling rapidly on sheet after sheet of paper and from time to time taking a rare and precious old coin and scrutinizing it with extraordinary care.

"*Ah, si.* He have *antigo dinero, si.*" And then suddenly a new expression swept over her face. "*Dios,*" she said. "Ralph!"

After that it was the work of only half a minute for Mrs. Craggs to be seated at the driving wheel of some vehicle capable of the most amazing speed, and then to reincarnate her picture of Professor Partheman and put on to his lips a stream of sound that could not have meant anything to anybody, but made it perfectly clear that the old man was a fluent speaker of Spanish. Rosita seized a coat and scarf and showed herself ready for instant departure.

"But, hurry," said Mrs. Craggs. "We ain't got much time to lose. That Ralph gets there by two o'clock."

They had not much time, but in theory they had enough. Buses from outside the college ran at twenty-minute intervals; the journey to the professor's took only half an hour or a little more, and it was only just 12:45.

But.

But bus services everywhere suffer from shortage of staff, and when they do they are apt simply to miss one particular run. The run missed that day was the one due to pass Royal Galloway College at one p.m. exactly. That need not have mattered. The 1:20 would bring them to within a couple of hundred yards of the professor's by 1:55 at the latest. And it arrived at the college on the dot. And in the words of its conductor it "suffered a mechanical breakdown" just five minutes later.

Mrs. Craggs posted herself plank in the middle of the road. In less than a minute a car pulled to a halt. An irate lady motorist poked her head out. Mrs. Craggs marched up to her.

"Life an' death," she said. "It may be a matter o' life an' death. We gotter get to Halliman's Corner before two o'clock."

The lady motorist, without a word, opened the car's doors. Mrs. Craggs, Mrs. Milhorne, and Rosita piled in. Once on the go, Mrs.

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Craggs explained in more detail. The lady motorist grew excited. But she was a lady who relied more on the feel of the countryside than on signposts or maps. And a quarter of an hour later all four had to admit they had no idea where they were.

"The telephone," suggested the lady motorist. "We shall have to go to a house and telephone your professor."

"No good," said Mrs. Craggs. "He don't never answer it when he's working. Rare old miracle he is like that. Ring, ring, ring, an' never a blind bit o' notice."

"I'd die out o' curiosity," put in Mrs. Milhorne.

"So would I, dear," said Mrs. Craggs. "But that ain't getting the United States Cavalry to the wagon train."

They resumed their progress then, eyes strained to catch the least sign of anything helpful. And it was Mrs. Craggs who spotted something.

"That old plastic sack on top o' that gatepost," she said. "I remembers it from the bus coming out. It's that way. That way."

The lady motorist, recognizing an infallible sign when she heard one, turned at once.

"We'll be there in five minutes," she shouted.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Craggs. "An' it's two minutes to two now."

There was a little argument about whose watch was right, but all agreed that two o'clock was bound to come before they reached their destination. And it did.

"Quick," said Mrs. Craggs, as at last they got to the familiar corner. "Up that way. We may not be too late. He may not've done it yet."

But she could not see in her mind's eye that prowling jaguar carefully mowing the old professor's lawn before he struck. And she could see, all too clearly, the thornlike obstinate old man defending his property to the last. And she could see frail thorns, spiky though they might be, all too easily being crushed to splinters.

The car pulled up with a screech of brakes. Mrs. Craggs was out of it before it had stopped. She hurled open the gate. The garden was empty. Ominously empty. Mrs. Craggs tore across the unmown lawn like an avenging amazon. She burst into the professor's study.

The professor was sitting holding up an ancient coin, scrutinizing it with extraordinary care.

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"Ralph!" Mrs. Craggs burst out. "Where's Ralph?"

Professor Partheman turned to her.

"Ah, yes, Ralph," he said. "Well, Mrs. Craggs, I happened to read in *The Times* this morning a most interesting article about research at Johns Hopkins University in America proving that women do have a particular skill in what is called nonverbal communication. Or, to put it in popular terms, their instinct is to be trusted. So with that fact at my disposal I decided to give credence to your—ahem—feeling and left a note on the gate telling Ralph I no longer required him. Yes, you can trust a woman's intuition, Mrs. Craggs. You can trust it for a fact."

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Craggs.

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a *NEW* Hollywood story by

RON GOULART

Take the 'tec trail again with the hip ad man from Hollywood, in another hanky-panky segment in Tinsel Town—this time an offbeat affair involving Kerry Dent, an aging egocentric actor who does his own stunts, his much younger wife Sue Bee, a nosy reporter-photographer for a tabloid, and Demon the Wonder Dog, all connected, directly or indirectly, with the Barx Brothers Smoke Alarm television show . . . start chuckling now . . .

HOW COME MY DOG DON'T BARK?

by *RON GOULART*

They couldn't use those final pictures of him. The photos were too much even for *Worldwide Intruder,* which is why the last picture of Kerry Dent to run in that particular tabloid showed him looking tan, fit, and relatively unwrinkled.

It was the other photos in the *Intruder* which caused Dent to do what he did. If it hadn't been for those earlier pictures, and the unflattering little stories and captions accompanying them, he wouldn't have ended up out in San Fernando Valley in such terrible shape.

Well, his wife had something to do with it, of course. And that impossible dog, too.

Dent told me his suspicions concerning his wife when I visited him on the set of his television show late in the spring of last year. I'm sure you know he was married to Sue Bee Brannigan who does all the commercials for Galz Beer. A striking girl, if not overly supportive. He was a shade over 29 years older than Sue Bee.

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His suspicions and complaints about the dog I was already pretty familiar with. His feelings concerning Demon were why I was on the Wheelan Studios lot that bright, relatively clear morning. My advertising agency had bought his new show, "Demon & Co.," for our client, the Barx Smoke Alarm. That's the one that barks and howls like a dog to warn you that your house is on fire. Dent's show seemed perfect for Barx and within three weeks of its first airing, "Demon & Co." had shot up to the number three spot in the ratings. Not bad for a television show staring a German Shepherd and a 59-year-old daredevil actor.

The trouble was, Dent had developed the notion the dog was jealous of him. He took to calling me at the ad agency, and eventually at my home in the best part of Santa Monica, to tell me how insanely jealous Demon was of him. Dent was convinced Demon was deliberately flubbing scenes, wasn't growling on cue, was mugging and letting his purplish tongue loll out during Dent's best dramatic moments and, on three occasions at least, nudging him off high places where only the actor's agility and long experience in action films saved him from serious injury. I'm not overly fond of animals, but still I found it difficult to accept most of what Dent told me.

As I approached the indoor set where Dent was supposed to be rescuing, aided by Demon, a country-and-western singer who was marooned in a flood I heard a great deal of snarling, barking, and shouting.

"Out, I want that gink out of here! Let me go, let me smack him in the beezer!"

That was Dent. You couldn't mistake his voice, which had never quite shaken his Bronx childhood.

"Easy, Kerry. Your pudgy face is getting all flushed. It's going to be coronary time if you don't watch it."

I reached the set in time to see Dent break free of the assistant director and key grip who'd been restraining him from charging at Ben Walden.

Walden was a tall, lean, and moderately handsome young man in his late twenties. He set his camera safely on a vacant canvas chair, pivoted, and stepped out of Dent's way.

"Gigolo!" accused Dent, spinning around. "I told you what I'd do with your camera if I ever caught you around me again!"

"Relax, Kerry," suggested Walden. "Your flabby body can't stand such stress."

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"Flabby! I'll shove that—"

Dent, his narrowed eyes on the reporter, didn't notice the approach of Demon. He tripped over the dog and landed with a smack on the sound-stage floor.

Walden, snatching up his camera, clicked off six shots of the actor. "Beautiful, beautiful. All your chins are showing nicely." Then cradling the camera in his arms like a football, Walden jogged away.

He was out of the place by the time they got Dent on his feet again. "Didn't I give strict orders that nobody from the *Intruder* ever be allowed near me?"

The director patted Dent on the shoulder. "The guy slips in, Kerry, he's elusive."

"And you!" Dent kicked out at the dog, missed, and nearly lost his balance.

"Why don't we take five," the director urged. "Pull Dolly out of the tank, Skipper. We'll try the scene again in a few minutes."

"I can do it now," said Dent.

"Few minutes. Go sit down and have a drink."

"I don't drink. I haven't had a drink in three years, no matter what you read in the damn *Intruder*. 'Aging Hasbeen, Looking the Worse for Booze, Totters out of Gollywood Bistro on Arm of Long-Suffering Wife.' You better keep Walden off my set, off the lot. Otherwise there's going to be real trouble." He noticed me then and came hurrying over.

"You're looking well, Kerry," I made the mistake of saying.

"Why shouldn't I look well? I'm in damn fine shape. I do all my own stunts in this halfwit show," he told me, face still flushed. "Which is more than I can say for Demon, my illustrious co-star. He needs a double for all the difficult stuff. Come into my dressing room so we can talk."

I followed him through a doorway and down a corridor. "The client is a little worried about—"

"Did you see what he did just now? Tripped me so I couldn't wind Walden's clock for him."

"An accident, dogs aren't as bright as—"

"And look at this dressing room." He jerked the door open.

"Cozy."

"Cozy my fanny! It's tiny. You know who had this dressing room before me? That clunk who starred in *Cybernetic Midget*. Yeah, this is a dwarf's old dressing room." He stalked to a small

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refrigerator, took out a bottle of Perrier water. "Demon has a kennel the size of Pickfair, while I—"

"The client was worried by the last story in the *Int*—"

"Listen, I'm a part of your life, right?" He gestured at one wall with his glass of sparkling water.

There were framed stills from some of his old movies mounted on the wall. A shot from *The Dancing Pirate,* two from *Captain Juggernaut,* one from *Fort Gordo,* and a whole series from *The Avenging Cavalier,* which was Dent's most popular movie.

"I saw most of your pictures," I admitted, "when I was a kid."

"Ha, ha. Very funny. You're as old as I am."

"I'm forty-four, you're fifty-nine."

"Forty-four isn't that far from fifty-nine. However, I don't have the problems you civilians do." He sipped at the water. "I take care of myself, good care." He patted his chin. "That's *one* chin you see, no matter what snide lies Walden writes in the *Intruder.*"

"It's not so much the lies as the photographs. The client feels—"

"That bum hounds me! He sneaks around and snaps pictures of me when I'm at my worst. He waits for some unfortunate pose, then snaps and runs."

"The picture in this week's tab is particularly unfortunate. Where you're hitting that blind beggar woman over the head with her own accordion."

"It only *looks* that way. Because of that wily jerk Walden," explained the actor. "I was helping the old bat adjust the damn thing and *snap* there's Walden and his camera."

"You were caught standing in front of the Naked Nickelodeon," I reminded. "With that poster behind you promising explicit romantic action inside."

"You don't understand what it is to be a celebrity," Dent said. "I can't take a walk or meet a friend without some nitwit reporter or photographer popping up and trying to make me look bad. The worse offender is that—"

"Maybe you should quit strolling in places like the Los Angeles tenderloin."

Finishing his Perrier, Dent turned to face me. "You recall the picture of me three weeks ago in the *Intruder?*"

"The one where you're doing a bellyflop in your pool. Flabby Kerry Does Flop. The client thought—"

"He climbed over the wall of my estate to snap that." The actor turned his back on me. "At least, I thought that was his only

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reason for being there. Now I—well, it's one of those little everyday troubles you have to live with."

I said, "I don't think the Barx Brothers can live with many more of your little everyday troubles, Kerry. What is it?"

He gestured at another wall of photos. "I've had four wives, everybody knows that. I swear the only one I ever cared for is Sue Bee."

"She's a striking woman."

"Of course she is. I only marry striking women. Sue Bee is also intelligent. How many people do you know who've read all the way through Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past?*"

"I read it in college, and my wife read it while she was in the hospital with—"

"Never mind," he cut in. "The trouble is, despite her intelligence—well, Sue Bee is being unfaithful."

I nodded. "These days, Kerry, with society in a state of—"

"Unfaithful to *me*! And do you know who the guy is?"

"No, who?"

"Him! The jerk with the camera!"

"Ben Walden?"

"That bum with the camera, yes. Walden is cuckolding me."

"You're absolutely sure?"

"Figures, doesn't it? Explains why he's trying to destroy me in the pages of that filthy rag. Over-the-hill Swashbuckler Makes Feeble Attempt at Comeback. Feeble? He knows we knocked off the two top shows. The network ought to have a few more feeble swashbucklers like me."

"Wait now," I said. "Do you know for certain your wife's having an affair with Walden, or do you just suppose she is?"

"I know *here!*" He thumped his handsome chest. "Look, if you're an artist you *sense* things. I know. Old Man Dent Takes Snooze After Too Much Booze. He's trying to make me look ridiculous in the eyes of Sue Bee."

"But a woman of her intelligence wouldn't—"

"Just because she's read Proust doesn't mean she wouldn't have an affair with Walden."

I was silent for several seconds. "Going to be tough using any of this with the Barx Brothers," I finally told him. "If true, this is a logical explanation for why the *Intruder* seems to be picking on you. But the idea of your wife fooling around will upset them even more than—"

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"You can tell the Barx boys to stick some of their smoke alarms—"

"Kerry, let me think about this. I'll see if I can—"

"Always the ad man. You can't react to anything with your *guts*. You have to write memos, take a couple dips in the think tank."

I cleared my throat. "This probably isn't the best time to ask you about the publicity stills."

"What stills?"

"Ones of you and Demon standing under a Barx alarm."

"Tell you what." Dent put a hand on my back. "We can use Demon's stand-in. That dog is an angel, a gem of a hound. Sweet, considerate, the absolute antithesis of Demon. I keep telling them to take Demon out and retire him or something and use the damn stand-in. They won't hear of it, especially Tessica Janes, the bimbo who claims to be Demon's trainer. She's got them all hoodwinked into thinking Demon is unique. He's unique all right, but—"

"Ready to shoot again, Mr. Dent," someone called outside the door.

Dent straightened, smiling. "Don't brood too much about anything that's happened today," he said to me. "I have an uncanny ability for bouncing back. And you're going to see one hell of a bounce any day now."

The agency sent me to Mentor, Ohio, a few days after that encounter with Kerry Dent and I didn't see him again for nearly a month. We'd been test-marketing a new bread in Mentor, a loaf which was 20 percent sawdust and called Lumberjack Bread, and some problems had arisen. Nearly everyone who ate so much as a slice of the experimental bread had come down with a disease closely resembling the flu. There was a definite danger of the media getting hold of the story. We couldn't afford to have the whole country hearing about a new blight known as the Lumberjack Bread Disease.

I was able, with a mixture of diplomacy and bribery, to keep the whole mess hushed up. Working very covertly we got all the test loaves out of the supermarkets and dumped into a handy river. That dumping gave us another problem, since it turned out that Lumberjack Bread was capable of killing fish even with its wrapper on.

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As I say, I didn't get back to Los Angeles until a month or more after my meeting with Kerry Dent on the "Demon & Co." set. Not that I hadn't been in communication with him, or rather he with me. Dent, possibly because he knew I'd been a fan of his swashbucklers in my youth, decided I was the one person he could confide in.

The phone in my slightly mildewed Mentor motel room rang at all hours. Dent's complaints were all variations on ones I'd heard before. Sue Bee continued to be unfaithful with Ben Walden of *Worldwide Intruder,* Demon loathed him and was making enormous efforts to sabotage his comeback, Walden was so audacious that when he sneaked into Dent's mansion to woo his wife he managed to snap unflattering photos of the dozing actor. Despite his claims of renewed vigor, Dent seemed to nap a good deal, as the frequent pictures showing up in the *Intruder* attested.

One particularly bleak morning in Ohio, just after my lovely secretary had rushed in to tell me 5000 dead fish had been sighted floating down the river with several loaves of Lumberjack Bread leading the pack, Dent phoned me collect. He claimed he had absolute proof that Demon not only hated him but was actually trying to kill him. In a scene for the eleventh episode of their show the dog was supposed to remove a smoking stick of dynamite from the vicinity of the bound-and-gagged Dent. He swore, and claimed to have witnesses, that Demon switched a real stick of dynamite for the prop one. If Dent hadn't sensed something was wrong and gone rolling over a low precipice he would have been blown up.

I pointed out that real dynamite could just as likely have blown up the dog when he snatched it up in his powerful jaws. Dent told me the dog had deliberately dawdled instead of rushing in to pick up the dynamite stick. Pacifying him as best I could, I went out to do something about all those dead fish.

My last, although I didn't know it at the time, encounter with Kerry Dent took place by accident. I was out in San Fernando Valley to call on a well-known sci-fi writer in Woodland Hills to see if we could persuade him to endorse a new pizza line the agency was involved with. The author, an extremely surly man, was not at all impressed by the Unidentified Flying Pizza and came close to punching me. Feeling very much like someone in an *Intruder* gossip item, I slunk away from his home and dropped

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into a valley restaurant for a cup of coffee to calm my nerves.

It was a noisy place, because of the prerecorded whip cracking and pistol shooting, and at first I wasn't aware of the hissing.

"Hsst, over here."

It was Dent, wearing a nylon jumpsuit and dark glasses and without his hairpiece. "Are you incognito?" I inquired, joining him in his booth.

"Used to know Whip in his heyday and I stop by here now and then."

Whip Wigransky's Burger Rancho was one of six such spots in the valley. It didn't seem to me that a nostalgia for the old B-Western actor was what had brought Dent here. "You have," I mentioned, "paw prints all over your front."

He glanced down, frowning, and brushed off some of the muddy spots. "Ho, ho," he said.

"You sound happy. I take it those prints aren't the leftovers from another attack by your co-star."

"That dumbunny isn't a co-star. I'm a star and he's only a bit player." Dent appeared considerably more relaxed than he'd been lately.

"I'm glad you're in a jovial mood. I thought maybe the picture in this week's *Intruder* would have—"

"Ho, ho, ho. That sort of guff rolls off my back. Fat Old Actor, Looking Terrible, Escorts Stunning Much Younger Wife to Premiere. Walden'll have to do a lot better than that to dampen Kerry Dent's spirits."

"I'll pass that news on to the Barx Brothers."

"Give them my love."

I watched his partially masked face. "What are you up to?"

"Having a Bar-B-Q Burger, Owlhoot Style," he said, smiling. "That's all."

"You're out here, disguised, looking smug. It's not like you."

"You didn't know me in my heyday," he replied. "I often went around looking smug. Recently I've found a way to return to the happier moods of yesteryear."

"Are you drinking again?"

"You can't drink and do your own stunts and keep a crazed hellhound from destroying you." He chuckled, relaxing even more. "I was stupid for a spell, now I'm getting all my old smarts back. There was a rock-and-roll tune I used to be fond of years ago. About a guy who suspected his wife was two-timing him. He asks

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the suspected lover, 'How come my dog don't bark when you come round my door? Maybe it's because you been here before.' I was like that, stupid. Now I see things as they really are. I've devised a plan to bring me complete and total happiness."

"You haven't gone and joined some lunatic cult?"

"Cults join me." He locked his hands behind his head. "You and the Barx brood need have no fears. In a short time I shall have everything worked out to the satisfaction of one and all."

"Tessica Janes lives out here in the valley somewhere," I said, recalling the fact all at once. "You haven't been visiting her and making threats?"

"That bimbo and I have little to do with each other," Dent assured me. "She trains Demon, I am forced to act with him. That's our only link."

"She's a pretty large young woman. Doesn't look as though she could be intimidated."

"I don't blame Tess for what Demon does. He hates me and plots against me entirely on his own," he said. "Say, look who's coming in. It's old Whip Wigransky himself. Excuse me while I go wrestle with him. It's a long-standing custom."

"Sure, certainly." I sat there, not even turning to watch the good-natured horseplay which was amusing all the other customers. Deep inside I felt very uneasy. I had a premonition something was going to happen, something which would affect the show and annoy the Barx Brothers.

Immediately after this I had to leave town again. There'd been a disastrous fire in the Barx Brothers main factory in Trenton, New Jersey. The place had burned to the ground and not one of the 10,000 smoke alarms sitting in there had so much as yelped. The wire services had picked up the story and both *Newsmag* and *Tide* were sending people in. The Barx Brothers, with the exception of Carlos who refused to come back from Bermuda, met with me for two days while we worked out a rush campaign to counteract the effects of what had happened.

By the time I came up with a copy approach which satisfied us all, except for Jocko who went off to join Carlos in Bermuda, and wrote some commercials three weeks had passed. I was on the plane back to L.A. when the news came through. I learned about it because my stewardess was sobbing and I asked why.

"The poor darling old man," she managed to say between sobs.

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"He's been a part of my life since earliest girlhood. I simply adored his swashbuckling films and his TV shows and—"

"Wait a minute. You can't be talking about—"

"Yes, isn't it awful? Kerry Dent is dead."

"Kerry Dent is dead?"

"I heard it on the news just before takeoff."

"How did it happen?"

"Oh, it's too terrible."

She was referring of course only to the official version of Dent's passing. Nobody ever released the true story, which was fortunate I suppose. It's possible that Ben Walden knows most of the truth, but he won't be writing it up in the *Intruder*. Not unless he can figure a way to make his own part in the events seem admirable. Which isn't likely.

As you probably know, I don't like to get too involved in affairs of this sort. Since I was curious, though, and since I felt I owed it to the agency to find out why the star of our top-rated show had been torn to pieces, I did some digging.

What follows is, I believe, a relatively accurate account of how Dent met his end. Some of it I've had to guess.

Dent had come up with a plan to remove the two prime sources of grief in his life—Ben Walden and Demon. He was certain Sue Bee would return to him completely when there was no more Ben Walden around. He also believed Demon could be very easily replaced on the show by the stand-in, a much more admirable dog. He figured it would be to the benefit of all concerned not even to let on there'd been a switch. One German Shepherd looked pretty much like another.

He arranged things so he could put his plan into action the night Tessica Janes, Demon's trainer, was not at home. The girl was scheduled to attend a screening of the punk rock remake of *Boys Town* on the night in question. Dent, with the help of Whip Wigransky, had already planted in Ben Walden's mind the idea that Dent was having an affair with Tessica. That fateful night Whip phoned Walden with a tip that the girl was going to skip the screening and spend the night with the aging actor. Dent assumed Walden wouldn't pass up a chance to get pictures of him in such a compromising situation.

Dent had been, very secretly, working out in San Fernando Valley at a seedy dog-training school. That was where he'd been the day I ran into him. The paw prints I'd noticed had come from the

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vicious German Shepherd that Dent was training. This dog was designed to be a watchdog, eager to kill anyone his master ordered him to kill. Dent was his master.

Actually it wasn't a bad plan. Lure Walden to Tessica's place and set this killer dog on him. The police would find the body of a snooping reporter who'd obviously been torn to pieces by a mad German Shepherd. There would be Demon in his cage looking sheepish.

Even if Tessica claimed the dog had been locked up all night, the evidence of a dead *Intruder* reporter would contradict her.

Dent arrived a half hour before the ten-o'clock assignation time that he'd had Whip pass on to Walden. It was an exceptionally clear night with more stars out than you usually see in Southern California.

Parking his rented van in a wooded area behind Tessica's spread, Dent led his killer dog out of the vehicle and down to the ranch. By diligent spying earlier he knew there was only one old servant to worry about. The man was in his late sixties and slept in a cottage near the main entrance of the ranch. There was a cyclone fence around the three acres, but it wasn't electrified. Dent had no trouble clipping a section out of it.

The police would naturally assume that Walden, hot after a hot story, had done the snipping.

Up to here Dent's plan went well. He crossed onto the ranch grounds with his dog.

There was an arbor to the left of the ranchhouse. He took the German Shepherd there and crouched in the shadows to await Walden.

He debated whether or not he ought to let Demon loose after the killing. He decided it would be safer not to. As he'd already figured out, no matter what Tessica and the old servant might claim, they'd never convince the police that it wasn't Demon who'd done the killing. There were only two collies and a Spaniel in the kennels here. None of them could be blamed. The frame would fit only Demon.

Unfortunately there were three things Dent couldn't have anticipated. For one thing, he couldn't have known that Walden, who was spending some time with Sue Bee, would be late by about 20 minutes. Nor did Dent know that on the evenings when Tessica was away the old servant let Demon loose for a romp around the ranch.

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The third thing he couldn't have expected was that his killer dog, while aggressive with people, was fearful of other German Shepherds.

So when the roaming Demon, sensing the presence of Dent and the dog in the arbor, came galloping in there, the killer dog yelped and ran away through the hole in the fence.

Demon then leaped straight at Dent.

I'd always thought Dent was exaggerating about the animosity Demon felt toward him. It turned out, though, Dent was absolutely right.

That dog really hated him.

"Q"

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a *NEW* detective story by

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A detective character and a crime locale both new to the pages of EQMM—from the creator of Mrs. Pym of Scotland Yard . . . In his Foreword to a recent book by Nigel Morland, Eric Ambler reminds us that "Nigel Morland has made his living as a writer since he was fifteen. His first novel appeared forty years ago; he has lost count of those published since." (Editor's note: well over 200, we are told) . . .

THE DE ROUGEMONT CASE

by *NIGEL MORLAND*

Jersey, the largest of Britain's Channel Islands, is not the sort of place where anything spectacular ever happens; but when it does it is always remarkable—as, for example, the de Rougemont case.

This occurred in the lonely northern parish of St. Jerome where the local inhabitants were mainly concerned with the growing of potatoes and tomatoes for the mainland markets.

To understand something of the official background, it is as well to explain that Jersey's only large town, St. Helier, possesses regular uniformed police. In all the outside parishes (each one a self-contained unit) the law is administered by a Constable through his Centeniers—civilians who work without pay but who hold full powers of office and, indeed, under the Law, supreme power; it is a system that goes back to Duke William of Normandy (William the Conqueror) from whose lands the Islanders originally came. And one of the obstinate Norman-French speaking peasants of Jersey was Jean Soustrelle.

Centenier Soustrelle was a peaceful man, a farmer who could trace his ancestry back a thousand years to Normandy. He was a

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Norman countryman to the life—short, stout, and rubicund, a bumbling man of remarkable amiability and an almost bovine look. And one still August morning, when France just across the waters of the bay looked as if it were only a mile away, Soustrelle was told that Richard de Rougemont wished to see him.

"De Rougemont?" Soustrelle ambled from the byre where he had been working when his housekeeper summoned him. "Who has bought the new house on La Rochelle Point?"

"Veritably, m'sieu." The housekeeper spoke in the antiquated French common in the families of the old *Jersaise*. "He is deeply disturbed, that one."

"H'm." Soustrelle wiped his hands on his grimy jeans and slipped his bare feet into a pair of *espadrilles*. "Inform him I will be there within moments." He paused in the kitchen to take a quick swig from a jug of Calvados.

Richard de Rougemont was waiting in the stuffy parlor in the front of the Soustrelle farmhouse. He rose from his chair as Soustrelle entered—a tall neatly dressed man.

"Good morning, Centenier." His voice was harsh and obviously he was no local product, for he spoke in the clipped English of the mainland. "I am sorry to disturb you. I have bad news."

"Yes?" Soustrelle's mild blue eyes were unsurprised. "It is of a truth that it is always bad news when I am called Centenier."

"I see." De Rougemont touched his forehead with a shaking hand. "Mr. Soustrelle, I was born in Jersey but left as a boy for England where I have since lived. Now that I have retired I returned here with my wife, to live out my years in a peaceful place."

"Excellent. And . . . ?"

"Centenier, for a long time I have suspected she had a lover. I could not prove it. When we came here I rented a house in the west end of the Island, in St. Michelet. To please her I have since bought a house on La Rochelle. We were to move in next week. Yesterday afternoon my wife did not return to tea, nor did she return during the night. I was alarmed but did not take any action because twice before she has spent the night at our new house to enjoy its atmosphere—she is an artist, an amateur, you see." Soustrelle nodded as if this explained such eccentricity. "I went to our house."

"And . . . she is there?"

"Yes. The house is filled with our furniture, ready for us to

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move in, but we were waiting a few days until the smell of new paint has vanished—I find it sickens me. Yes, she is there." De Rougemont paused. "She is on the bed in our room. A man is beside her—a man named Venning who, my *dear* friends have hinted to me, was her lover."

"You mean, they are dead?"

"I smelled gas when I opened the front door. I tried the bedroom door; it was locked. There is a balcony and I went there, peering into the bedroom." De Rougemont shuddered, covering his eyes with one hand.

"We will go there immediately. You have a motor car?"

The de Rougemont car was as new and shining as was, Soustrelle observed, the de Rougemont house. It was a fine place on a promontory overlooking the sea and the distant beaches of France, shining whitely under the sun.

Inside the wide hall Soustrelle sniffed gently, admiring what he could see of this elegant house so far superior to his peasant's farmhouse. And with a peasant's interest in money he wondered what all this splendor had cost.

De Rougemont led the way upstairs, through a spare room to a balcony which ran the length of the house. He paused before an uncurtained French window.

Soustrelle peered through the glass, then made a small sound of distress. On the bed, fully dressed, lay a gray-haired man and beside him a good-looking woman of early middle age.

"You will go at once for the doctor, Mr. de Rougemont. It is the red house at the end of your road. Advise him and mention my name."

When the sound of a car moving away had reassured him, Soustrelle lifted one foot, ruthlessly kicking in the glass of the door and muttering when he bruised his big toe. The fresh breeze from the sea emptied the room of gas quickly, once the French windows had been opened. Soustrelle sniffed cautiously after some minutes, then entered.

Both bodies were cold; on the dressing table was a note signed *Agnes*, a brief heart-cry explaining that, devoted as she was to her husband, she and Venning could no longer face life in their separate worlds and had resolved to die together.

Soustrelle muttered angrily in French; he hated waste of any sort and here were two lives thrown away, to say nothing of de Rougemont's sorrow and, perhaps, that of Venning's family.

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But there was work to do. The room had to be examined to satisfy Soustrelle's inborn sense of doubt and caution.

The hissing, unlighted gas-fire was turned off. The windows were checked; Soustrelle observed they were carefully sealed with wide Scotch tape. The typical pertinacity of suicides was revealed in the diligent way the crack round the door had also been completely sealed with tape. Even the keyhole was closed with a small sticky seal; the key lay on the dressing table, next to the letter.

When the doctor at last arrived and had confirmed what had happened, there was a curiously mulish expression on Soustrelle's round face. Against the doctor's objections that he was busy, that there was no need for it, Soustrelle insisted—which he was empowered to do—that a post-mortem should be done, and not until he was given the results of it did he visit the big white house where the Constable lived, with a brass plate on his front door which announced: *Connétable,* a title meaning much more than its bald English translation.

The plump white-haired old man who was, as it were, the father, the councillor, the protector of his parish, listened to Soustrelle's story without speaking.

"I understand, my good friend. Then they died of gas poisoning?"

"Of that there is no doubt." Soustrelle's head moved from side to side in that odd Gallic gesture which can mean anything, and his shoulders came up. "There is present a mild sleeping drug, a barbiturate, which Dr. Mathieu says is not unusual—suicides do such things that they might die painlessly without knowing they die; the tablets we find on the table beside the bed."

"There remains a problem? Come, my good man, I recognize that stubborn look only too well."

"I am not content, you will understand, Michel. May I continue with my investigations?"

"Such a fine word! You mean, it is not suicide in a locked room, sealed from within? Come, Jean, you are not a man of imaginative fancies. There is no harder head on this island."

"Will you have patience with an old man, Michel? You permit?"

"Until tomorrow night. After that we must follow routine. We have enough harsh words about us from the Paid Police in St. Helier—I do not wish to give them more reason to say our antiquated system is also stupid."

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Soustrelle went home and put on his good gray suit and the trilby hat that his long-dead wife had once bought for him on a trip to Verona. He summoned Pierre-Marc, who owned the decrepit village taxi, and bade him to drive to St. Helier, "And with care and caution, my friend, for much as we like the tourists who bring us prosperity, they always forget the narrowness of our twisting little roads."

St. Helier was packed with the hordes of holiday-makers who pour into Jersey every year for sunshine and tax-free tobacco and liquor. Through these throngs Soustrelle made his slow way, to spend an hour in a *bistro* near the Harbour where visitors never went; but the place was popular with the native born, particularly the ancients with their remarkable knack of knowing supposedly hidden secrets which passed steadily as the small change of gossip.

Following that, Soustrelle visited several shops, finding what he wanted in the last of them. Then he returned with Pierre-Marc to St. Jerome and spent some minutes in the now-empty de Rougemont house. He delved through the rooms and peered interestedly in a broom closet where he found a portable hand vacuum cleaner, the type used by good housewives for going over soft furniture.

Standing in the new and unused sitting room, staring through the windows at the gentle sea, Soustrelle was far away. He lighted his pipe and the rank aroma of the French tobacco he favored was all about him. His shrewd, always cynical peasant mind worried at the problem he was brooding over and gradually, piece by piece, he erected an edifice of deduction. He examined it with slow mental eyes from every conceivable angle and could find no flaw in it. He nodded at last, making a little jerking motion of one hand as if he would were demonstrating the upper half of a ball.

The patient Pierre-Marc was waiting in his taxi. He was ordered to drive Soustrelle to the house of Prunier, the Constable of St. Michelet Parish where de Rougemont rented a house. There the story was told again and, eventually, Prunier sent for one of his Centeniers and they went to de Rougemont's home.

But there they learned he had left to stay at a hotel in St. Helier. This irritated Soustrelle because it meant complications, and more work. He thanked Prunier and went back to St. Jerome where he carefully wrote out in his round schoolboy hand in its

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official form a deposition which he took to his Constable for an authorizing signature. It was given reluctantly and then only because of Soustrelle's written assurance that he knew what he was doing.

Pierre-Marc was required to journey back to town again, and there Soustrelle visited the Constable of St. Helier, then the Chief of the Paid Police; Soustrelle, two uniformed men, and the Constable of St. Helier now visited the hotel where they found de Rougemont and arrested him for murder.

The sensation was a big one, for Jersey seldom has capital crimes, and at the height of the season the States, which governed the Island, did not know whether to be pleased at the inevitable influx of tourists which would follow or irritated at the necessity of working with the judicial system of Britain and its government, which would be automatic in such a crime. The sole evening paper had no doubts—its front page that evening dealt with little else.

It was a weary Soustrelle who eventually joined the Constable of St. Jerome for a verbal post-mortem.

"It is done, Michel. The wheels now turn and it is for law to proceed."

"De Rougemont presented no difficulties?"

"I have seldom seen a man so disturbed. He was so sure of his security that when he was arrested his control was broken. He has of a certainty confessed in full."

The Constable looked at the stolid man on the other side of his dining-room table, poured him another glass of Calvados, and waved one hand.

"Come, Jean, you are not on a stage. You shall disentangle this little mystery of yours and not behave like the dubious hero of a *roman policier*."

Soustrelle's smile was a contraction of his features rather than an exhibition of mirth.

"It was not easy, Michel. I made some inquiries of friends and, it would seem, this de Rougemont has money difficulties, and in England before he left he ran up many large bills; he was also not *simpatico* with Madame de Rougemont. He had, however, become intimate with a woman of great wealth and few scruples who will solve his troubles at the price of marriage. But Madame de Rougemont, as a good daughter of the Church, would never for one little moment consider divorce."

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"Ah!"

"Precisely. De Rougemont invented the story of the lover: the man Venning is simply a friend of the family. De Rougemont had them both round to the new house to drink wine to its success, a wine containing a mild sedative. When they were sleeping he carried them to the bedroom and there set the scene of the false suicide, even to the forgery of the little letter from his wife."

"And sealed the doors and the windows from the inside, and left the key on the dressing table." The Constable's voice held a note of mild reproof, and he looked sharply at Soustrelle's Calvados.

"Michel, you mock an old friend! He sealed the windows and round the inside of the door while it was still open he placed an overlapping stretch of adhesive tape—*Écossais*, is it not?"

The Constable chuckled.

"*Scotch* tape, my dear Jean; it is of America, a trade name that has become an ordinary descriptive term."

"Precisely. I am of course an ignorant man. However. He also placed a small square of tape on the inside of the keyhole, then closed the door. With a little vacuum cleaner moved round the crack of the door he sucked the tape, as you might say, so that it became a tight seal, securing the door. The lock? Simple! He had a duplicate key made, filed off a fraction from the nose and locked the door from the outside—the nose of the key, being absent, thus did not break or even mark the little seal."

"Perfection! A locked and sealed room like something from a sensational *feuilleton* in a boy's magazine!"

"Just so. A clever plan, adroitly conceived."

"You are to be congratulated, my dear Jean. But," and the Constable wagged a cautionary finger, "in future no more guesswork. It might have turned out unsuccessfully and we of the Parish would have looked foolish."

"Guesswork?" Soustrelle's large smile was roguish. "I forget!" He smote his forehead. "A sealed room, an air-tight room, Michel? De Rougemont on entering the house, he informed me, smelled gas. But when I entered all I could smell was new paint. A small thing, you understand, a very small thing, but we farmers are apt to notice such small things, for are we not small men?"

"Q"

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Captain Leopold, head of the Violent Crimes Squad, knew how to play it by the book. There were crime situations when it was dangerous to innocent people if the police acted too quickly, when the best and safest course for the police was to negotiate with the criminal. But this particular situation, calling for patience and parleying, took a completely unexpected turn. . .

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD AND THE THREE HOSTAGES

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It began as a straightforward robbery that quickly developed into a hostage situation. That was enough to call in Captain Leopold's Violent Crimes Squad, which was the closest thing the city had to a specially trained SWAT team. Leopold himself was at the scene before the drama was an hour old, directing the development of his troops with all the skill of an urban general.

The gunman, a seedy-looking fellow in his mid-twenties, was holed up in a dry-cleaning shop he'd tried to rob. When things started going bad with the arrival of a police car out front, he'd seized the girl behind the counter and two male customers, herding them into a back room where he threatened to kill them if the police didn't leave.

Leopold had cautioned against an immediate storming of the building, now empty except for the drama's principals, but as the second hour stretched toward the third he grew restless. "No movement in there," Lieutenant Fletcher reported. "Maybe he's killed them already."

Leopold shook his head. "We'd have heard the shots." He knew what all the textbooks said—that in situations like this it was

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always better to play for time and try to negotiate. The theory was that the better the gunman and his hostages got to know each other, the less likely it was that he'd kill them. Leopold, who grew nervous when innocent people were under a gun, didn't fully subscribe to this idea, but he decided to wait a little longer.

Finally, brushing aside the television newsmen with their mini-cameras trying for a six-o'clock news scoop, he made a decision. "I'll try talking to him once more. If that doesn't work, we go in."

The room in which the gunman was holed up was a large windowless storage area near the rear of the building. Leopold's men found they could call into the room through a ventilation shaft, but so far the gunman hadn't answered. This time Leopold put it to him directly. "Look here, we're willing to negotiate. But unless you start talking and let us know those people are alive, we're coming in after you."

For a moment the silence continued. Then, quite clearly, came the gunman's voice. "Go away, cop, or they're dead! I'm not talkin' to you!"

"What do you want? A car for a getaway?"

But the cornered man seemed incapable of any sort of planning. "Go away!" he shouted out again, and then there was silence.

Leopold retreated across the rear parking lot to the point where Fletcher and some of the others were waiting. "I think he's scared. He doesn't know what to do. Let's give him another hour and then go in." He glanced at his watch. "Four o'clock. If nothing happens by five we'll put some tear gas down that ventilator shaft."

At five Fletcher came to him again. "You sure, Captain?"

"Got any better ideas?"

"No."

"Then do it."

The tear gas started pouring down the shaft, filling the room where the hostages were being held, and within a minute they heard a single shot. Leopold felt a hard knot in his stomach. "Come on!" he shouted, leading the way. If he'd guessed wrong. . .

They broke down the door, letting the officers in gas masks enter first, and helped the hostages through the stinging fumes. Leopold counted as they came out. The girl first, then the two men.

He relaxed and started to breathe again.

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Fletcher, one of those who'd gone in with a mask on, came back to report. "Shot himself, Captain. You guessed right that he was scared."

"Dead?"

Fletcher nodded. "Through the head."

"I was hoping to save him too."

One of the hostages was led over, his eyes still tearing from the gas. "Are you in charge, sir? My name is John Mice. I wanted to thank you for a job well done. You saved all our lives."

Mice was a slim middle-aged man in a conservative suit, and Leopold figured him for a banker, which was almost right. "Not all," the Captain corrected. "The gunman killed himself."

"I meant the hostages." Mice was dabbing his eyes with a wet handkerchief. "Now can you get me to a telephone, please? I lost a million-dollar deal while I was a prisoner in there."

Leopold decided he didn't much like the man. He turned him over to a patrolman and went to see the other hostages. Both were receiving medical attention for their smarting eyes. The girl, in her early twenties, was sobbing quietly as other employees tried to comfort her. The second man, a young bearded fellow in jeans, was being interviewed by a TV newsman. They'd catch the six-o'clock show, and there was always the late news too.

Leopold waited till they carried the gunman out in a plastic bodybag, then decided it was time to leave. He was heading back to the car when Fletcher intercepted him, looking grim. "We got a problem."

"Like what?"

Fletcher held out the little Beretta automatic. "This is his gun—but he never fired it. The thing's a model, like they make for collectors. Same weight and feel, but the barrel's blocked and the bullets are dummies."

"But he's dead! How in hell did he shoot himself in the head with a fake gun?"

"When we found this the boys started searching. They found a second Beretta, identical except that it's real, in a rubbish barrel."

"But—"

"Captain, I know it sounds crazy, but when that tear gas started pouring in, one of those three hostages killed him."

The dead man's name was Ronnie Nichols, and he was a high-school dropout with a record of minor arrests over the past ten

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years. There was nothing special about him in life, but in death he was becoming very special indeed. First of all, Leopold wanted reports on the three hostages. He detailed Connie Trent to check the girl, while Fletcher tackled the other two. Back in his office at mid-evening Leopold's first question was, "What about prints on the gun?"

Fletcher shook his head. "Wiped clean."

"Connie? How about the girl?"

Sergeant Connie Trent was as efficient as she was attractive. She flipped open her notebook and read off the facts. "Lucy Burgess, age twenty-three, unmarried. Employed for six months at the One-Day Dry Cleaning Service. Prior to that she was in New York, trying to break into show business. Her family's in Florida. She has an apartment alone in that new west-side singles building."

"A swinger?"

Connie shrugged. "How do you tell these days? She didn't look much like one with tear gas in her eyes."

He swiveled to Fletcher. "What about the two men?"

"John Mice, a stockbroker."

"I met him."

"He's forty-seven, was picking up a suit on his lunch hour. Married but separated from his wife. Mostly worried because he lost the commission on a million-dollar stock purchase for a big institutional account. He was supposed to phone in the purchase this afternoon and now the market's closed till Monday and the client has changed his mind. The guy with the beard is Cal Colder, twenty-eight, unemployed house painter. One arrest for possession of pot. A fine and suspended sentence. No evidence he knew the gunman. They don't live near each other, but of course anybody can meet in a bar."

"All right," Leopold said. "And I suppose none of them admits firing the fatal shot."

"They all say the same thing," Connie agreed. "When the tear gas started pouring in they couldn't see. They heard the shot and that was all."

"How do they explain the second gun?"

Fletcher grunted. "John Mice says Nichols must have had it hidden on him."

But Leopold shook his head. "The shot in the head killed him instantly, and the gun was found across the room in a trash bar-

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rel. How'd it get there if he shot himself?"

"You and I know that, Captain. But the three of them were in the room and they all say they didn't do it. Hell, why should they lie? The one who shot him could be a big hero!"

Leopold hit the desk a gentle blow with his fist. He felt like having a cup of coffee but the machine in the hallway was out of order. "That's just it, damn it! *Why*? Why not take credit for shooting him?"

"The gun," Connie suggested. "Perhaps it was used in another crime. When the tear gas started coming in, one of the hostages took out the weapon and shot Nichols before he could fire at them. But then the gun had to be ditched, because of the previous crime."

"Sounds good," Leopold agreed. "We'll know soon enough. Ballistics is running a check on it now."

But when the word came later it was negative. The weapon was linked to no crimes in their immediate area. "It's a big country," Fletcher pointed out. "I'm still betting on Connie's idea."

Leopold stirred in his chair. "The weapons were almost identical, remember—a real Beretta and a model. That could hardly be coincidence. What about the possibility that one of the three was an accomplice? When the hostage situation developed he or she went along with it, but when Nichols seemed trapped the accomplice killed him to keep him quiet."

"Mice doesn't fit the bill as an accomplice," Fletcher said.

"No, but Colder or the girl might," Connie argued. "We get cases all the time of bank tellers or supermarket clerks faking a robbery with their boy friends."

"Check that angle," Leopold instructed her. "Talk to Lucy Burgess again tonight—it isn't too late. Fletcher, you talk to Colder, and I'll tackle John Mice."

Connie arrived at Lucy's apartment during the eleven o'clock TV news. She was glad to see them playing down the mystery and accepting the death as a suicide. So far the word wasn't out. When the program switched to a commercial Lucy snapped off the set. "More questions?" she asked Connie. Her eyes were still red from the gas.

"Just a few."

"Honest, that phone won't stop ringing! Everyone I ever knew has called me! One girl asked if he raped me—can you imagine?"

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"I can imagine," Connie said. "I wanted to ask you about the gunman, Ronnie Nichols. Did you know him at all?"

"Know him?"

"I mean, was he a regular customer? Did you ever run into him outside of work that you remember?"

Lucy Burgess looked blank. "Gosh, no—he wouldn't have picked our place to rob if he was a regular customer, would he? I mean, we'd have known who he was and all."

"But you didn't know him? He was a complete stranger?"

"That's what I told you."

"And how did he act during the robbery?"

Lucy thought about it. "Well, the other two came in just ahead of him. I remember looking at the clock and it was just one fifteen. We're always busy Friday noons, with customers picking up things for the weekend. I was waiting on the fellow with the beard—Cal—when this Nichols pulled a gun and asked for the money. Funny thing, I took it from the register and held it out but he didn't take it. Instead he looked out and saw the police car pulling up. That's when he ordered us all into the back."

"Lucy, we know he didn't kill himself."

"Well, I sure didn't shoot him! You see any place I could hide a gun in the shirt and jeans I was wearing today?"

"It would have been difficult," Connie conceded, "but a Beretta is a small weapon."

"I still think he shot himself. He sounded like he was going to release us just before you all broke in anyway."

"Oh?" Connie made a note to relay that to Leopold. Then she decided to go on the offensive. "You know, Lucy, there are tests that would show if you fired a gun recently."

The girl snorted. "Come on, don't try that old chestnut with me! I used to have a boy friend who was a policeman."

Connie didn't press the matter. The old paraffin test was extremely unreliable and had been abandoned long ago. There was another test that was effective with firearms like revolvers that permitted leakage of metal residue into the skin. But the murder weapon was an automatic, and a good automatic almost never leaked discharge residue.

Connie decided there was nothing more Lucy could tell her.

At about the same time Fletcher was at the hospital with Cal Colder. The bearded young man had received a larger dose of gas

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than the others, and had been taken to the hospital for a few hours' observation. But he seemed fine now as he strolled out the emergency entrance with Fletcher at his side.

"I told you everything I know, Lieutenant. I went there to pick up some clothes and all of a sudden this guy walks in behind me with a gun."

"And you never saw him before?"

"Not that I remember."

"He was about your age. Maybe you had a narcotics deal with him once."

Colder bristled. "Look, I got busted once for having a little pot. In some states that's not even a crime any more! Are you guys going to keep throwing it up to me for the rest of my life?"

"Calm down. Suppose you just tell me where you were when the tear gas started coming in."

"Right under the vent! That's how I got such a bad dose of it."

"And the shot came almost at once?"

"Yeah, it was less than a minute. But by that time I couldn't see a thing."

"Where were the other two hostages?" Fletcher asked. "How come you weren't all together?"

"He didn't keep the gun on us all the time. There was nowhere we could go. Hell, I think that Mice was in the john at the time."

"Could either of the others have had a gun concealed on them?"

"Nichols never searched us, that's for sure. I don't think the girl could have had a gun, but that guy Mice might have. He came on pretty strong once or twice, real pompous—demanding to be released."

"What did Nichols say?"

"Nothing. He pretty much ignored him."

"Get the impression it might have been an act on Mice's part—that they might have known each other?"

"Hell, no! Man, how would those two ever get together? You think a guy like Nichols had a stockbroker?"

"Maybe they were related. Maybe Nichols was a black-sheep nephew, or even a son."

Cal Colder merely smiled and shook his head. "You cops! You should all be writers or something."

"That second gun came from somewhere. And one of you shot Nichols with it."

"Hell, don't you think we'd tell you if we shot him?"

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"Then what do you think happened?"

The bearded man shrugged. "He probably had the second gun on him all the time. When the gas started coming in he tried to throw the weapons away. The automatic hit the trash can and went off, killing him by chance."

"It won't wash. There were powder burns around the wound. The gun was fired close to his head, not more than a foot away."

They'd reached Fletcher's car in the hospital parking lot. "You going to give me a ride home?" Colder asked.

"Sure, hop in. It's on the taxpayers."

Leopold didn't get to see John Mice till morning, and the broker greeted him with an air of thinly veiled belligerance. "Am I to understand, Captain, that I was rescued from possible death to become a suspect in the killing of the man who held me hostage?"

"At this point we don't know what happened, Mr. Mice. That's why I'm here. No one has called you a suspect. We're just trying to establish exactly what took place."

"What about the other two?"

"They've been questioned also," Leopold assured him. "But you weren't as badly affected by the tear gas and we thought you might have seen more."

"I wasn't as badly affected because as soon as I saw the gas coming in I wet my handkerchief under a faucet and held it over my face. I read about doing that somewhere."

"But you didn't see anyone shoot Nichols?"

"The gas was much too thick by then. And a wet handkerchief over one's face and eyes does tend to obscure the vision."

"I guess that's all for now," Leopold said. "We'll be in touch."

He left John Mice's apartment and drove downtown to the dry-cleaning shop. A large exhaust fan had been placed by the shop on the floor by the front door, to rid the place of the last traces of tear gas. Leopold stepped around it and saw Lucy Burgess chatting with some other employees by the counter.

"Hello there. Did Sergeant Trent talk to you?"

"Just briefly. She came to my apartment last night."

"Then you know our problem with what happened here."

"She tried to tell me you could test my hands to see if I'd fired a gun!"

"Oh, I don't think she said that."

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"I told her I knew it wasn't true. I had a boy friend once who was a policeman."

"Here in town?"

She shook her head. "In New York. I lived there for two years, trying to break into show business. Then I came back to this." She waved her arm at the dry-cleaning machines and the racks of waiting clothes.

Leopold murmured sympathetically. "Broadway can be a tough place to get a start. I began my police career in New York before coming back here."

She looked at him more carefully then. "Why would anyone want to make a career of police work? I thought it was something people just stumbled into by accident. Like dry cleaning."

"Some of us plan it," he assured her. "I'd like to have another look at the room where Nichols held you prisoner. Come along—you can answer some of my questions."

They entered the windowless storeroom with its splintered door. Leopold glanced around at the cardboard boxes and bottles of cleaning fluid, noticed that the bloody spot was still on the floor where Ronnie Nichols died, and moved on to a door at the back of the room. "What's this? I thought there was only one way into this room."

"There is. That's the employees' john."

He glanced in at the toilet and sink, remembering John Mice's wet handkerchief. "Was Mice in here when the gas started coming?"

"I think so, yes. He told Nichols he was feeling sick to his stomach. The gunman checked to see there were no windows in here, then let him come in."

"So that explains why he didn't get as much gas as the rest of you," Leopold said. "But it also places him some twenty feet from Nichols at the time the shot was fired."

"I don't know. We couldn't see."

No one could see, Leopold decided, including himself. Colder and the girl were blinded by tear gas, John Mice was in the john, and Ronnie Nichols couldn't have shot himself.

"All right," he said with a sigh. "We may have more questions later."

He went back to his office feeling depressed.

Fletcher tried to cheer him up with news that the coffee

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machine was fixed. "Tastes pretty good too, Captain. Want a cup?"

"Not right now, thanks. This hostage business has got me down. If the papers get wind of it before we've got an answer for them, it'll look as if we goofed, as if we blew it."

"I've put somebody on all three of them, just to make sure they don't scoot out of town."

"The killer won't scoot. He—or she—feels perfectly safe."

Connie Trent came in with her cup of coffee. "I thought you didn't believe in the perfect crime."

"This one's far from perfect, Connie. Throwing the gun in that barrel instead of simply dropping it by the body was the killer's first mistake. Speaking of the gun, anything further on it?"

Fletcher shook his head. "We're checking with New York and Washington, but there's nothing yet. We have to assume the gun is clean."

"Maybe the three of them are in it together," Connie speculated, "like in that Agatha Christie movie where all the suspects were guilty."

"I don't care if it's one, two, or three," Leopold said, "if someone can tell me *why*! Why did they kill Nichols and try to hide the fact?"

Before either of them could answer, the phone rang and Fletcher picked it up. He listened, said a few words, then hung up. He was smiling. "One of our birds has flown, Captain. Cal Colder just came out the back door of his apartment house with two suitcases and loaded them into his car. He's heading north on the Parkway."

"Let's go," Leopold said.

They kept in radio contact with the car following Colder and intercepted the fleeing man at the city line. Colder speeded up when he saw the cars and went off the road in a cloud of dust when they cut him off. Fletcher was the first to reach the vehicle with his gun drawn. Cal Colder toppled out the door, tried to regain his balance and run, but he never had a chance.

Leopold walked over to where Fletcher held the man. Even in daylight the flashing red lights from the police cars slashed their faces, giving them an eerie, dramatic quality that the scene otherwise lacked. Cal Colder was an unlikely villain, and Leopold's first question reflected that. "What in hell were you running for?"

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"I—"

"Are you trying to convict yourself of killing Nichols?"

"I didn't kill him. I didn't even know him."

Fletcher was pulling the two suitcases from the back seat. "Your flight provides a reasonable assumption of guilt. It allows us to open and search these with a warrant."

Colder started to say something, then changed his mind. "I want a lawyer," he said instead.

"And you'll get one," Leopold assured him. "Open the suitcases, Fletcher."

In the lining they found several plastic bags of white powder. Leopold knew it would be cocaine before they even tested it.

"He was just unlucky," Leopold insisted back at the office. "Unlucky to be taken hostage and unlucky to try skipping town with the cocaine. Being unlucky doesn't make him a murderer."

"Then we're back to Lucy Burgess and John Mice," Connie said.

"Yes. Back to them."

"But you've already eliminated them both," Fletcher complained. "Mice was too far away and the girl couldn't have had the gun hidden on her."

"Maybe the gun was already in the room," Connie suggested. "It might have been one they kept for protection."

Leopold shook his head. "Then it would have been registered to someone at the dry-cleaning shop. This gun isn't registered at all, to anyone. It was probably stolen from the manufacturer and circulated through the underworld."

"The kind of weapon Nichols would use," Fletcher agreed.

"Except that he was using a model gun—a toy!"

"But why a toy gun?" Connie asked.

Leopold shrugged. "Maybe he thought it would go easier on him if he was caught."

But Connie disagreed. "If criminals thought that much about getting caught they wouldn't be doing it in the first place."

"Yeah, well, Ronnie Nichols wasn't the smartest guy in the world," Fletcher said.

"No, he wasn't," Leopold mused. Suddenly he stood up. "Fletcher, how did the squad car arrive at the dry cleaner's as quickly as it did?"

Fletcher flipped through the file. "A call-in. Male voice at one twelve reporting a holdup in progress. We've still got the tape."

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"Find out who it was?"

"Nope. We figured it was one of the employees calling from a back room, but nobody took credit for it."

"Let's go listen to that tape."

"What'll that tell us?"

"I don't know," Leopold admitted.

They went down to Operations and waited while the sergeant on duty backtracked on the tape reel that had recorded all the day's incoming emergency calls. Then they heard the operator answer and a muffled male voice say, "There's a stickup going on at the One-Day Dry Cleaning on Broad Street. Hurry!" Then the connection was broken.

"Almost sounded as if he was disguising his voice," Connie observed. She picked up the file again. "Odd. This call came in at one twelve, but Lucy Burgess said it was exactly one fifteen when the holdup man walked in."

"So her clock is fast," Fletcher suggested.

Leopold was interested. "Maybe we should check that clock."

"Now?"

"It might be worth a trip. I'll take a look on my lunch hour."

The little lunch counter near Headquarters was always empty on Saturday noon, and for Leopold it was a treat after the weekday crowds. There was even room to spread the early edition of the afternoon paper on the counter and read about the events of the previous night. A reporter with a literary bent had written a sidebar story on the three hostages and how the ordeal had affected them, even including the late-breaking news of Cal Colder's narcotics arrest. The part on John Mice mentioned the stock purchase he'd missed by being a prisoner for four hours, and Lucy Burgess was quoted as deciding to flee the scene of the crime for another try at Broadway.

Happily there was still no hint that the gunman's death was anything but suicide. Leopold could be thankful for that as he drove back to the dry-cleaning shop once more. This time the place was crowded with Saturday afternoon customers and Lucy was nowhere in sight. The man at the counter said she'd gone home at noon. Leopold glanced at the big wall clock and compared it with his own watch. The times were identical.

Still, Lucy might have been mistaken. With a gun pointed at you, anyone can make a mistake.

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Either she'd been mistaken or lying. And why should she lie?

Or was there a third possibility?

He stared down at the newspaper that someone had left on the counter, and an idea began to take shape in his mind. The more he thought about it the more improbable it seemed.

But he'd been a policeman long enought to know that the most improbable things often turned out to be true.

He asked to use the telephone and dialed Fletcher's direct line at Headquarters.

Two hours later when John Mice was ushered into Leopold's office they were all very polite. Fletcher produced a typewritten sheet and handed it to the broker. "We'd like you to read that sentence we've marked," Leopold said quietly. "Into this microphone."

The broker paled a bit. "What is it?"

"The transcript of a phone call we received here three minutes *before* the robbery at the dry-cleaning shop. We want to compare your voice print with that of the caller."

"I think I want my lawyer," John Mice said quietly.

"Certainly," Leopold agreed. "I was about to advise you of your right to counsel. We're going to hold you on suspicion of murder, and charges of embezzlement might well be added later. It was a tricky scheme, Mr. Mice, but it didn't quite come off."

Leopold went over the whole case on Sunday with Connie and Fletcher, after John Mice had made a full statement and signed a confession in the presence of his attorney.

"Once I considered the possibility that the clock was right and Nichols didn't enter the shop till one fifteen an interesting train of thought presented itself. What if the police were warned three minutes *before* the robbery began? If so, the caller had to be the thief or an accomplice, which would have made it a strange robbery.

"Was there anything else strange? Yes, there was—the bandit used a model gun instead of a real one, and he avoided actually taking the money Lucy Burgess offered him. Could there be any reason for this action, coupled with the advance phoning of the police? Yes, there could—*if the bandit planned all along to be arrested.* Certainly the use of a fake gun and the failure to take the money would lessen the charges against him.

"But then came the key question: if Nichols expected, even

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planned, to be arrested, what was the point in holding hostages for four hours? Was it possible that the hostages were the whole point of the crime in the first place? Then I remembered Lucy telling Connie that Nichols seemed about to release them when we burst in. Why? Was there any reason to hold the hostages till after five o'clock and then set them free? Did five o'clock have any special meaning to one of the hostages? It did."

Fletcher looked blank. "I missed that part. What happened at five o'clock?"

"The Chicago and San Francisco stock exchanges closed, allowing for the time difference. After five o'clock it was impossible for John Mice to complete his client's deal, even by a long-distance phone call to the west coast."

"Mice actually hired a man to hold him hostage for four hours?"

"That was the idea I played with."

"But he lost money by not completing the deal," Connie argued. "He lost his commission!"

"But what if he *couldn't* buy the stock for his client? What if he'd already embezzled the money? That newspaper article yesterday gave me the idea. Colder was into narcotics and Lucy Burgess had career problems, but only John Mice's life was specifically affected by that four-hour captivity. He failed to complete a business deal, but he had a perfect, unshakable excuse—he was being held hostage at gunpoint. Even if he was taken ill and rushed to a hospital he could have made a phone call to his office. But being held at gunpoint precludes even a telephone call."

"I never understood the ways of high finance," Fletcher admitted.

"Most institutional, and many private, clients maintain accounts with their brokers so that securities can be readily bought and sold. John Mice had been tapping the funds of this particular institution for some time when suddenly he found himself in a spot. They notified him on Wednesday that they wanted to buy heavily on Friday, in anticipation of good economic news over the weekend. Within days Mice's embezzlement would have been discovered. But if he was prevented from making the purchase on Friday afternoon, he was sure they'd cancel their order rather than buy on Monday with a sharply rising market. Then he'd be safe until he had a chance to get his financial affairs in order and try to make up the embezzlement."

"So he went out Thursday and hired Ronnie Nichols?"

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"Mice had been prowling the bars since his separation and he'd struck up an acquaintance with Nichols. He promised him a large sum of money to pull off a fake robbery and hold him hostage for four hours. He gave him a model gun—one which he could duplicate with a real weapon—and warned him not to take any money from the cash register. The idea was that Nichols would surrender after five o'clock, release his hostages, and get off with a light jail sentence. He'd have Mice's money waiting for him when he got out. Nichols was too dumb to know that even with a fake weapon and no actual robbery he could be charged with kidnaping for forcing the hostages into that back room."

"But Mice killed him," Connie said.

"It was always in the back of his mind. That's why he had the real gun with him. There was always the fear that Nichols would tell everything if he got hit with a long sentence. When we released the tear gas we gave him the chance he'd been waiting for. He put a wet handkerchief over his face, walked quickly through the fumes while the others were choking, and shot Nichols through the head. His plan was to leave the real gun in Nichols' hand and throw the fake one in the trash barrel. It would have been suicide, open and shut."

"What went wrong?"

Leopold shrugged. "The model gun had fallen on the floor when Nichols died. With all that tear gas he just got them mixed up—they were the same weight, remember—and threw the wrong one away. If we'd found the real weapon by Nichols, we'd have had no reason to search further. As it was, we did search, and looked in the trash barrel."

"And if he didn't get a chance to kill Nichols?"

"He'd have gambled on the man not talking. He told me he gambled every day in the market anyhow, and this was only a different kind of gamble."

"He gambled on murder," Connie said.

"And he lost."

"Q"

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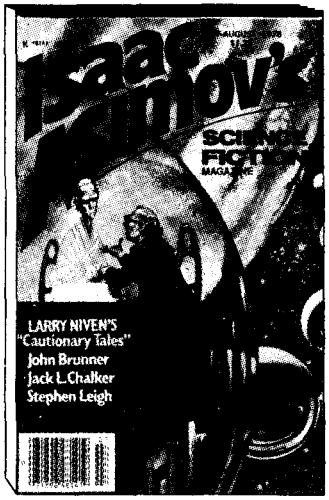

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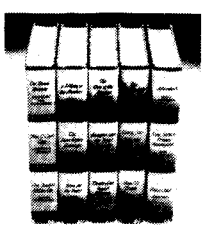

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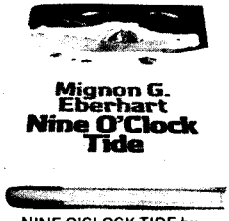

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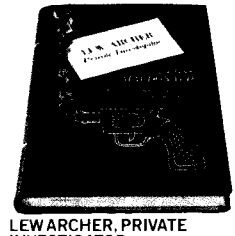

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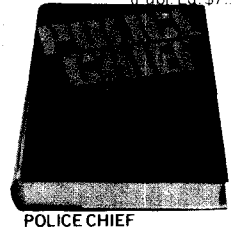

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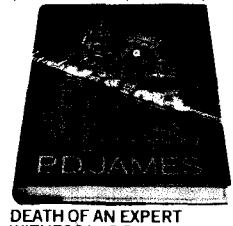

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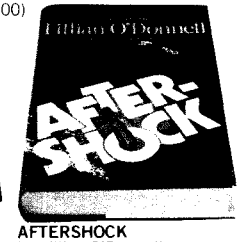

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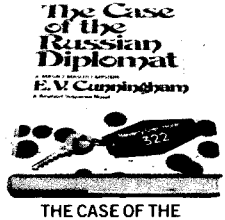

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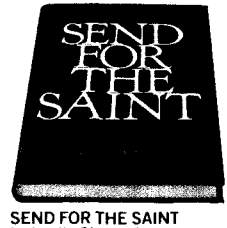

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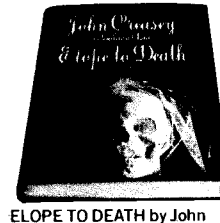

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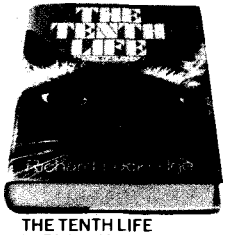

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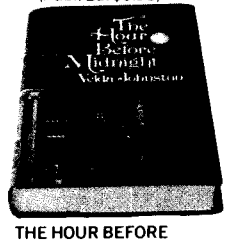

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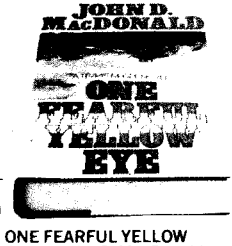

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